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Horror in Culture & Entertainment

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RUE MORQUE

CANADA'S PREMIER

MAGAZINE

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Ort Easton Ellis' *American Psycho*.



Note from Underground

Most film fans probably harbour the idea, however buried, of someday shooting their own movie. It's right up there with the best untried dreams, along with writing a novel or starting a rock band. In all probability, only a precious few of you reading this are either seriously considering, seriously pursuing, or seriously promoting an independent movie.

Those few will hopefully have already learned their first lesson about the film business, namely, that it is exactly like any other business: like, say, a laundromat, or a pizza parlour. Making movies in Hollywood is pretty crass business at the best of times (that size, those toppings, speedy delivery), and although business is booming, the climate ensures that filmmaking is seldom – if ever – about art.

Hollywood, of course, is merely the product of its time. North America is founded on the capitalist ideal and a natural consequence of that is that it sees most things, art included, as marketable commodities. It wouldn't be bad if this kind of thinking stayed in the boardroom (where it belongs), but the reality is that it seldom does. No matter how many artsy fartsy film types complain about how the financial backers are screwing up their film, the truth of the matter is that they too understand their art primarily in terms of its commercial value.

That's why it is a common practice for filmmakers to approach projects in terms of a genre, and the appeal it will have for the target audience. "Appeal", by the way, indicates commercial appeal which means that, no matter how dream-driven a project is, it's being fashioned with the tools of consumerism right from the get-go. Next time you chance on an interview with a name director, listen closely to the way he or she talks about the film.

One filmmaker who speaks in an entirely different manner is Dario Argento. Argento is a veteran director of the genre, only he's never shot a picture in Hollywood. His studio is Northern Italy, where he grew up, and assorted spots around Europe, where he feels most at home. To hear him talk about his films is a little like having him tell you about past romances; they may be gone but the memories are full of love and loss and passion. Not the way a puzzlemaker talks.

It would be naive to say that Dario Argento exists in a vacuum, and I have no doubt that the European film industry can be just as commercial as Hollywood is. But Argento's words reveal that he is – to a large extent – above it all.

The proof, as they say, is in the pudding. I think anyone would have a hard time understanding much of Argento's work, and especially a film like *Suspiria* – with its wash of primary colours and unearthly music – as anything other than the cinematic vision of a visionary. Interestingly, Argento is often criticized on these shores for making movies that don't make sense. What no one will criticize him of, however, is for making movies that are not straight from his heart.

Whatever your take on his movies, I encourage you to read our interview with Dario Argento beginning on page 14, where you will glimpse something that is rare in the North American film industry: a filmmaker who is first and foremost an artist. Hopefully, the budding filmmakers among you will recognize that making a movie is about letting the marketing managers sort it out after you've shot it, not before. Your film – your art – cannot be made any other way.

-RG

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Dreadlines.

News Highlights



Honor Happenings

Horrorfind Weekend to premiere in Baltimore

Horrorfind.com, the World Wide Web's main search engine for all things horror will be taking it up a notch this year, with the highly anticipated premier of an all new genre convention. The Horrorfind Weekend of Horrors will happen August 24 thru 26 in Baltimore, Maryland at the BWI Airport Marriott.

Horrorfind owner/publisher Mike Roden will be setting the stage by having custom hearse limos ferry in his special guests, among them horror personalities Bruce Campbell (*Evil Dead*), Ben Chapman (*Creature From the Black Lagoon*), special effects gurus Tom Savini (*Day of the Dead*), Dick Warlock (Michael Myers from *Halloween II*), Doug Bradley (Pinhead from *Hellraiser*), Brinke Stevens (*Nightmare Sisters*) and many more. New additions to the guest list

as of this writing include Michael Berryman (*The Hills Have Eyes*), Reggie Bannister (*Phantom*) and Lara Parker (*Dark Shadows*), among others.

Roden says the convention will address the many facets of the genre, not just movies and moviemaking. Writers Douglas Clegg (*The Nightmarer Chronicles*), Jack Ketchum (*The Girl Next Door*), Barry Hoffman (*Born Bad*), Brian Keene (*No Rest For the Wicked*) and others will be on hand for readings and seminars dealing with everything from getting started as a writer to launching a website.

Other features of note: Leonard Pickel of *Haunted Attraction Magazine* will host a seminar on how to break into the haunted house business, and Firefighter/Paramedic Rob Vaccaro will give pointers on how to preserve your masterpiece in his seminar Haunted House Safety. John L. Burton of D.O.A. and long-time industry leader will also instruct attendees on creating an antiquated look in film and haunted house sets. Among the many seminars on special effects will be Kevin R. Alvey's Comprehensive Corpifying Techniques workshop. Alvey will demonstrate how to construct a life-like corpse to perfection.

The spirits of the dead will also be on hand at the Horrorfind Weekend. Mason Winfield, investigator and occult writer, promises to call up good and evil spirits at live séances on both Friday and Saturday night. And special Horrorfind Ouija boards will be available throughout the convention for spontaneous spiritual guidance or something a little more wicked.

"There are other events in the planning stages, such as a possible costume ball and



Tom Savini reads *Rue Morgue*, what else?

contest, maybe a killer clown visit, but these aren't in stone yet," said Roden.

The Horrorfind Weekend will also feature a huge dealer's room, as well as an on-site haunted house and movie screenings.

As a proud sponsor of the Weekend, *Rue Morgue* will be setting up shop in the main hall, so be sure to drop by our table and get an advance copy of our Halloween issue as well as rare *Rue Morgue* back issues and t-shirts.

For an expansive listing of events and appearances, check out:

www.horrorfind.com/show/horrorfind-weekend.html

Hope to see you there!



Horrorfind creator Mike Roden.

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Tromatized in the South of France

TORONTO, CANADA, APRIL 2001

In a strange and very direct way I have to thank *Rue Morgue* for involving me in the twisted tale that I am about to unfold here. One day in April of 2001 I received an e-mail from Rue Morgue announcing that Lloyd Kaufman of Troma was coming to Toronto. This quickly lead to an interview being set up with Lloyd for my television show called *Real To Real*, which lead to a lunch the next day with Lloyd, which lead to Lloyd asking me if I had ever considered making a film myself. Then it really got weird.

After meeting with Lloyd three or four times in Toronto and having a great time with him we decided to book up again in the South of France where we would both be for the 54th Cannes International Festival du Film in early May. Through e-mails we joked around about the film that I would make for Troma—I had even come up with a silly title and premise—I would call the film *Saving Private Toxie: Toxic Avenger V* and it would have Toxie being poisoned by his own guys in the Gulf War and then seeking revenge when he gets back to the States. How could such nonsense be considered anything but a joke?

Lloyd and I would joke about it in e-mails—I would suggest actors, he would suggest plot points ("Toxie should probably have sex with a bunch of German army nurses" was one of them) and he would finish e-mails with statements like, "Gotta go, I am finishing up the poster art for *Saving Private Toxie*."

CANNES, FRENCH RIVIERA MAY 8, 2001

It is the day before the beginning of the Cannes International Festival du Film—that yearly cinematic recreation of the merry old days of ancient Rome in the time of Caligula. As per arranged I dropped by the venerable Carlton Hotel on La Croisette where Lloyd and his band of flying psychomancers set up TromaVille, France every year. We (my co-host Richard Crouse and I) were planning on shooting an interview with Lloyd and doing a couple of stories about the legion of young volunteers that Lloyd attracts to Cannes every year like a toxic Pied Piper to "advance the cause of truly independent cinema." Before we even got inside the lobby of the Carlton we were greeted by a Troma type situation. One of the Troma volunteers was being arrested by the French Gendarme for indecent exposure (he was trying to enter the Carlton wearing

a thong). We were told that Lloyd had not arrived in France yet, but would arrive soon.

Richard and I headed up the Croisette for lunch at an outdoor café. In a matter of minutes we saw Lloyd Kaufman coming up the street. We jumped up and greeted each other with enthusiasm—we told him that he had better get up to the Carlton because one of his volunteers had just been arrested. "Oh fuck, already?" was his response as he hustled up the street.

After lunch we stopped by the Troma suite in the Carlton to conduct the first interview of a series of a few with Lloyd in Cannes. We strolled around the Troma suite looking at the posters and artwork from *Terror Firmer* (back in Cannes by popular demand—"Just like *Apocalypse Now*" according to Lloyd Kaufman), *Jefftown* and *Citizen Toxie*, shaking our heads constantly at some of the images. Then my eyes lighted on one particular four-colored poster on the wall. It was a poster for a film described as being "In Development" called... *Saving Private Toxie: Toxic Avenger V*? To say that I was stunned into muted silence doesn't quite do it.

Later during the interview I asked Lloyd to elaborate on this new Toxie feature that was in development ("You thieving little bitch!" was how I ended the question to Lloyd's perverse delight). He told the story on camera of how we came up with the *Toxie V* idea together while we were recently in prison. Then he told the true story and finished with the statement that he was actually in Cannes selling the idea as a viable film and was trying to attract financing for it. I walked out of the Carlton into the sunshine and glitz of Cannes in a daze thinking that I now have to start thinking of ideas for a movie called *Saving Private Toxie: Toxic Avenger V*.

CANNES, FRENCH RIVIERA, MAY 16, 2001

On a beach across from the Martinez Hotel there is a nightclub that is the setting for the big Troma Beach Party. We have brought our camera and cameraman Mark Pridmore to interview Lloyd again in this setting and shoot some of the party. To try to describe this Troma party in any kind of linear narrative sense would be to do it an injustice. It is best described in tiny hallucinogenic snippets.

I was interviewing Lloyd, we were being quite serious in our chat about how the Sundance Film Festival is no longer about truly independent cinema. Before I knew it, there



A Tromatic Moment: Christopher Heard and Lloyd Kaufman at Cannes

was a naked Tromette (wearing tiny Sgt. Kabukiman decals over her nipples) standing between Lloyd and I as we finished our chat.

In the middle of the crowded, sweltering hot, dance floor the Toxic Avenger, Mad Cow, Dolphin Boy, Sgt. Kabukiman and a few Tromettes began a slumdance that threatened to literally disassemble the entire structure. Toxie jumped up and started swinging from one of the steel support beams until it became dislodged. I grabbed my cameraman Mark to pull him out of the way in case the roof literally fell in.

Later, I was standing on the dock when two of the Troma team approached me to ask me to shoot their next stunt. They were about to strip naked—spray special effects blood from their mouths, then dive off the dock into the chilly Mediterranean waters. I ran to get Mark to shoot it and had to pull him away from a woman dancing on a table wearing nothing but a sheer black lace body stocking.

By the time I got to the dock the event was over, but one of the jumpers, a Troma team member known only as Big Tasty, was in the surf doing rather unspeakable things with a fake severed head.

The crowd got thicker and weirder, the beer and the champagne flowed, the music got louder. As we left the party I sought out Lloyd to thank him and found him, despite the noise and chaos that seemed like it was about to cause an atomic reaction of some kind. We shouted a few things to one another even though we were inches apart, shook hands and parted company. Then I heard Lloyd's hoarse voice calling me. I turned to hear him yell: "Always remember Chris, Toxie loves you!"

Do you spell surreal with one or two Rs?

—Christopher Heard

Dreadlines. ROADKILL

from the
Info Highway

www.ya-horror.com

Though still in development, this Yahoo look-alike threatens to be a promising new horror hub, offering a Ya-Horror perspective on everything the genre has to offer. Cooled perk on the site: free e-mail with the Ya-Horror extension.

www.sirenweb.com

The web arm of the famous downtown Toronto store Siren, this site showcases gorgeous goth-inspired clothing, fetish gear, accessories, jewelry and other beautiful merchandise of the macabre.

<http://photo.spacesports.com/~mot/>

Here's your chance to chew the fat with Ed Gorman, Tom Piccirilli, Barry Hoffman, J.D. Passarella and Robert Weinburg. Andy Fairclough's Horror World provides access to these and many more genre writers through on-site message boards.

www.ghoultown.com

Ghoultown's music has been described as "Bonanza meets Charles Manson" (also see Audio Drome RM#20). Find out what that means at their site and, while you're at it, tick or treat yourself to a pair of ultra-steamy girls' panties with cow skull and crossbones where it counts.

www.marbidmortuary.com

Yet another great web parlor with its own creepy personality. Morbid Mortuary has a slew of message boards catering to every warped taste and includes news, views and dozens of downloadable horror movie covers.

www.somethingspooky.com

Meet the Spooky Girls and see their spooky wares, including cool jewelry, clothing and other miscellaneous horror-related goodies for creepy cats and kittens.

www.rmowings.com

Check out this trippy online horror/fantasy comic book brought to you by Rue Morgue's own Dale L. Sprule and starring John W. Bowen! Can it get any better?

-compiled by Mary-Beth Hughes
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Scream Jason, Freddy and the creatures from *The Gate* to invade Canadian digital TV

New Canadian horror channel coming this Fall

The Canadian broadcasting powerhouse Corus Entertainment is getting ready to launch a slew of new digital channels this fall, including one dedicated entirely to horror, appropriately titled *Scream*.

The new channel will feature "non-stop thrills and chills with horror and thriller movies, series and magazine style shows focusing on the genre." Viewers will be able to tune in round the clock to catch modern-day classics, "teen screamers", classic horror and B-movie cult films.

"We're in the process of confirming deals and getting the programming schedule together," said Sally Tinsal, Director of Media Relations. Although Corus was unable to give extensive details about pro-

gramming at the time of writing, the tentative fall movie-programming schedule includes *The Gate* and *Gate II, Angel Heart, In the Mouth of Madness, Jason Goes to Hell, Nightmare on Elm Street I-IV, Prom Night I-IV, Return of the Swamp Thing* and *Phantom of the Opera*.

What is certain is that the channel will be highly interactive, much like Corus YTV which encourages viewers to interact with the channel through the Internet. *Scream* will be available digitally via satellite or set-top boxes in a subscriber-based format.

Corus Entertainment owns a number of specialty channels, including YTV and the Country Music Channel. *Scream* is a joint venture with Alliance/Atlantis in Canada.

Dark Carnival re-released, World Horror Con awards Ray Bradbury

Gauntlet Press is now taking orders for the highly anticipated re-release of Ray Bradbury's classic short story collection *Dark Carnival*, originally published in 1947. 752 copies (700 numbered and 52 lettered) were printed for the limited edition run and copies are being snapped up fast.

One of the most exciting bonuses in the new edition is the inclusion of four stories which Bradbury published in *Weird Tales*. An original oil painting by the author will grace the cover. For ordering information and more details about the book check out www.gauntletpress.com.

In other Bradbury news, the author was named Grand Master of horror for the year 2001 at this past May's World Horror Convention. The distinction is announced each year at the convention, and the award was presented at the ceremony.

The Grand Master award is administered by the World Horror Society, an unincorporated literary society. Aside from

Bradbury, Tom Piccirilli was also presented an award by local writer and publisher John Pelan. Bradbury was not in attendance.

Ten Grand Masters have been named since 1991, including Clive Barker, Robert Bloch, Ramsey Campbell, Harlan Ellison, Stephen King, Dean Koontz, Brian Lumley, Richard Matheson, Anne Rice and Peter Straub.

To be eligible for the Grand Master award, the recipient must have contributed significantly to the field of horror, must be alive at the time of voting, and can not have already received the award. The Grand Master award was the only award presented by the World Horror Convention.

-with files from Hellnotes.



Joey Ramone R.I.P.

"Hey, daddy-o, I don't wanna go. Down to the basement. There's somethin' down there."

-Ramones, 1976

The first time I saw him up close he must have been twelve feet tall, he had pale white skin and looked like he might collapse on stage if not for being propped up by the mike stand. There was only a small gathering of freaks, social misfits and other assorted curiosity seekers crammed into a tiny piss-stained dive in small town Ontario. But that night, the Ramones played full-tilt for two solid hours with more energy and raw passion that I doubt I'll ever see again in a live show. Maybe that's why it came as such a shock when punk rock icon and self-professed horror fanatic Joey Ramone died of lymphoma at exactly 2:40 p.m. April 15th, Easter Sunday, 2001. He was 49 years old.

Ignored by radio and never pretty enough for MTV, the Ramones were a musical horror themselves, embracing just about everything that really makes this life worth living: horror movies, comic books, mental dysfunction, cute girls and true love, punk style. The Ramones' ferociously delivered an absurd and hilarious four-chord hybrid of

'60s bubblegum and turbocharged rock 'n' roll was hailed as classic - but not one song ever cracked the Top 40.

An exhaustive list of Joey Ramone's influence would read like a phone book of music's current who's who. His influence on the horror genre can be seen in bands like The Groovie Ghoules, Electric Frankenstein, Rob Zombie and Lemmy from Motorhead, while a quick over to the Misfits' website demonstrates just how important Joey was to New Jersey's creep gods.

Although never a horror band per se, The Ramones' drew significantly from the genre: their classic "Gabba Gabba, we accept you" chant from Pinhead was adopted from Todd Browning's 1932 horror flick *Freaks*. Many of the band's early songs also drew heavily from horror themes: You're Gonna Kill That Girl, Chainsaw, I Don't Wanna Go Down To The Basement and You Should Never Have Opened That Door, to name a few.

In 1979, Joey Ramone teamed with B-



The original rock and roll monster, as we remember him.

movie king Roger Corman for *Rock 'n' Roll High School*, the definitive apocalyptic teen flick. A decade later he recorded Pet Sematary for long time fan Stephen King. He even worked with Tobe Hopper on the banned-in-the-UK video for 1983's *Psycho Therapy*. He wanted the airwaves, he wanted to be well and bopped till he dropped. Gabba Gabba Hey Joey, we miss you already.

-Tom Dragomir

Blatty, Friedkin sue Warner Bros. over Exorcist shares



The Exorcist: Legal battle costs a darker cloud over classic horror films.

Exorcist cohorts William Peter Blatty (author, screenwriter) and William Friedkin (director) have teamed up again, this time for a lawsuit. The duo are suing *The Exorcist*'s producer and distributor, Warner Bros. and its affiliate organizations, Turner Network Television and Turner Broadcasting System. The suit filed in Los Angeles Superior Court states, "Warners has improperly allocated to the film unreasonably low shares of the total license fee paid by licensees where the film is sold as part of a 'package'." In effect, Blatty and Friedkin are alleging that Warners sold the original and new versions of *The Exorcist* to affil-

iates TNT, TBS and A&E for extremely low rates and, consequently, drastically reduced Blatty's and Friedkin's profit shares. The suit alleges that Warner Bros. "has tried, in every possible way, to divert revenues from plaintiffs...." Though she has not yet had the chance to review the lawsuit, as of press time Barbara Brogliatti, a spokesperson for Warner Bros., said, "We never comment on matters of litigation, especially those that are ludicrous." Blatty's and Friedkin's lawyer would not give specifics on the amount sought in the suit, but said it would be somewhere in the neighborhood of "eight figures".

-Mary-Beth Hollyer

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What's Brooding...

with *Vulvaria Wick*

FULL MOON ECLIPSED Full Moon Pictures is experiencing financial difficulties and may be forced to discontinue operations according to a recent financial report. The company that made their name on *Puppet Master* submitted an operations report to the OTC Bulletin Board on May 25, stating that "the Company's liabilities exceeds its current assets and that it has not been able to generate positive cash flow from operations, which raises substantial doubt about its ability to continue." Full Moon's stock, listed on the OTCBB, fell drastically since January from upwards of \$1.80 to 20 cents in June 2001. The report also stated "insufficient funds have required the Company to scale back its operations" by more than 40 percent to 25 employees, most of the crunch going to its production and post-production departments. Full Moon plans to trim its release schedule from 24 to about 15 to 18 titles per year, putting more emphasis on merchandise related to the *Puppet Master* and *Blood Dolls* films and their partnership with Playboy Entertainment, which will see the

production of two erotic features under the Surrender banner. In effect June 2001, Full Moon will reduce prices on their 117 catalog films, so get out there and snap 'em up

A CURSED FILM DreamWorks, in competition with Disney, recently snapped up the remake rights to the Japanese horror hit *Ring*, for a meagre \$1 million. The film has been compared to the smash hit *The Blair Witch Project* and even pegged as the scariest film since *The Exorcist*. The story involves a mysterious videotape that causes the deaths of anyone who watches it within a week's time. We're just thankful that Disney didn't get a chance to put Mickey Mouse into the film, but we're skeptical that DreamWorks will do a much better job. Best bet, get your hands on the original from: www.blackstar.co.uk.



Ring: DreamWorks to remake Japan's scariest horror movie.


CANNED GODZILLA Ever wondered what Godzilla meat would taste like? Well, it seems the folks at Takara Co. were wondering the same thing when they came up with the idea to can - you guessed it - Japan's favourite mon-star into *Godzilla Meat*. "People can eat Godzilla and become powerful," says Takara spokesperson Yoko Watanabe. "It's got dreams mixed in with fun. It's like Pegeye and his can of spomch." Apparently, Takara was unsuccessful in hunting down the actual creature, so they've substituted with corned beef and packaged it with pies of Godzilla. If you want to sample the dino delicacy, you'll have to buy an airline ticket to Japan - Takara doesn't have plans to export canned Godzilla anytime in the near future.

BARK AT THE MOON Clive Barker is expanding once again with his upcoming DVD compilation in association with several musicians, including Jonathan Davis of Korn and former Oingo Boingo keyboardist Richard Gibbs. After hearing a Davis piece inspired by his art, Barker struck upon the idea of releasing a DVD which would showcase his art with music. The DVD will feature twelve original Barker paintings, accompanied by a newly-composed soundtrack. Barker said the paintings will be "imaginative and wild portraits of strange and otherworldly creatures." The release will be produced by Sony and is expected to be in stores later this year.

CREEPY CONTEST Are you really ugly? Then surf on over to www.buycostumes.com and enter yourself in their "Face Off" contest. "Celebrating the creativity, imagination and time dedicated to creating a Halloween look, BuyCostumes.com is calling for entrants who can morph their faces - using hands, makeup or nothing at all - into something truly unique." The winner will have the honour of having his or her ghoulish visage immortalized in a one-of-a-kind hand-crafted latex caricature mask. Also take home a party pack with other goodies from BuyCostumes.com. The winner and runners-up will be announced in early October, just in time for Halloween.

VISIT RUE MORGUE ONLINE! The *Rue Morgue* staff invite you to drop by the magazine's revamped Web site at www.rue-morgue.com. The site now includes regular weekly news updates, *Rue Morgue* Horrors, detailed links, listings and our horror events schedule. Help us in serving up the gore: drop by the site and fill out our survey! ☠

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This Fall, one of horror's most unnerving, visionary films gets its much awaited DVD treatment. Italian splatter master **DARIO ARGENTO** recalls **SUSPIRIA**, his manifesto of fear.

GROTESQUE PARABESQUE

by Rod Gudino

† If there is a controversial filmmaker within the horror community, Dario Argento is it. His artfully rendered sadistic set pieces have made him a director which only those with an eye for extreme visuals have been able to appreciate, and yet, even they are divided on what to make of his films. Many horror fans adore him. Many don't.

A director with over 30 years experience making films of exquisite design and cruelty, Argento is as much lauded as he is criticized for his stylistic excesses and his lack of narrative coherence. In the movies of Dario Argento, however, said coherence (or the lack of it) is more often than not, irrelevant.

Born in 1940 to artist parents of Italian/Bavarian descent, Argento drew much from his mother Elsa, a professional photographer, and his father Salvatore, a prominent figure of the Italian post-war community. While working as a film critic for the Rome daily newspaper *Paese sera*, Argento was asked to join Bernardo Bertolucci in writing Sergio Leone's *Once Upon a Time in the West*. The break allowed him to eventually pursue his own project, 1970's *The Bird With the Crystal Plumage*, which revealed that the novice director had flair for the giallo, or grisly murder mystery.

Though the giallo dominated much of his early work, Argento's oeuvre reveals that certain ideas and themes hold continual fascination for him, notably sexual repression and its violent expression, trauma, sadism, mystery and the mutilation of the female body. Though he has explored these themes in some fifteen films, and most recently in the upcoming *Sleepless* starring Max von Sydow, Argento's best-known work continues to be his 1977 supernatural horror fable, *Suspiria*.

Aside from having been a significant international hit and launching him into the front ranks of the horror genre, *Suspiria* is Argento's first – and arguably his best – thorough excursion into stylistic excess, what became his primary cinematic concern from then on. The film is the subject of a DVD reissue this upcoming August, when Anchor Bay Entertainment re-releases the definitive *Suspiria* package which now includes the remastered film and a 50-minute featurette on Argento reflecting on his masterpiece.

Even by today's standards, *Suspiria* is a film that is not easily forgotten. It tells the story of Suzy Bannion (Jessica Parker)

who enrolls in a Bavarian dance school which turns out to be secretly run by a powerful coven of witches. Although the story remains fairly rudimentary, its stylistic indulgences are not; *Suspiria* unfolds like a baroque nightmare of artfully rendered murder set pieces soaked in primary colours and blasted through with outrageously loud music and shrill demonic voices. Flamboyant and violent, *Suspiria*'s luscious ghastliness sets it apart from anything else the genre has produced – ever.

The movie opens with an exploding orgy of sound and images, as Suzy rides a cab through a blue rain storm. Somewhere not too far away, a frightened woman is attacked in her room by an unseen figure who repeatedly stabs her, ties a noose around her neck before returning to stab her exposed, twitching heart and send her crashing through an atrium skylight. The spectacle is brought to its sadistic crescendo as the camera dwells on the bloody dangling corpse before turning to show a female spectator lying nearby, artfully gored by a large chunk of glass.

The "aesthetic debauchery" of *Suspiria* garnered Argento a lot of critical attention, which he countered with characteristic disinterest, saying only that he would rather not discuss where his "dreams" (as he refers to his movies) come from. Nevertheless, as he reveals in the following interview, he can hardly be accused of being impersonal or of avoiding questions. Argento speaks of his films candidly and enthusiastically, making it impossible to deny that – whenever explanation is ultimately given – they are unequivocally the product of his heart.

Paradoxical perhaps, is that a man who would manufacture such a detailed tapestry of cruelty would say that he does so "to be loved". Argento's motivation, like his movies, reveals that he inhabits a place that is completely his own.

Rue Morgue spoke with Dario Argento in May.



"It makes me feel like a criminal when people cut my films."

-Dario Argento



Suspiria has been your most successful film in North America. Why do you think that is so?

Really I don't know why. Every country has a different sensibility, you know.

This film is about

the witches and magic and maybe North American audiences like those topics more than the Europeans. *Suspiria* is also a very big success in Japan but in Italy it was not so great [laughs]. *Deep Red* was a lot more popular. But I am very close to *Suspiria* - I would say it's my best film. It's much more fantasy-based and creative; I would say the nightmare in it is more profound. Also I feel it's a very peculiar piece. I remember when I wrote the first draft of the film, the characters were aged eight and nine and the school was a children's school. But everybody was against that idea and I was convinced by the financiers to raise the age of the characters to twenty or so. But if you see the film, it still has the point of view of children - the doors are bigger, like when you are a child you see doors as being bigger - and many things in the school are still like a children's school. I filmed it in the spirit of children.

Did you adapt it from a story?

No. It was my fantasy.

Was it a fantasy that you turned into a story or a story that you turned into a fantasy?

First of all I had the idea to tell a story about the witches. At the time I was very interested in this theme about dreams and witches and old European religion. I did a long trip all around Europe - Germany, Switzerland, France and Northern Italy - to find out if witches really existed. It was a very interesting trip and I met some people who pretended to be witches and I also visited a school in Switzerland which was a bit esoteric. It was an interesting experience and during this trip - which lasted about three months - I got the idea. I was also interested in the life of Helen Bravinski. I am not sure if you have heard of her. She wrote lots of books at

the beginning of the century and many people think she was a witch.

You have often described your movies as dreams and especially Suspiria seems to be like that. What is the connection between dreams and movies?

Therapists often say that movies are like dreams because they have stories on a screen with characters, just like a dream, you know? And when you dream, it's night and you are in your bed and you have a film running in your brain, so I think every film is a dream in part. But my films also follow the rhythm of dreams, sometimes very fast, sometimes slow; this is the difference between my films and other films. My films are similar to dreams; sometimes they are like nightmares and they are written differently from other films.

Some would say that a feature of mainstream films is that they present a coherent story that makes logical sense and many times this is not the case with your movies.

Yes, exactly. Those other films are like a police report [laughs].

Do you use your dreams to communicate your ideas or do you use them to explore ideas?

I use them to explore ideas.

Do you then feel that you know yourself better as a result of your work?

Knowledge? Yes, maybe, but more happiness. My ideas were not to be a star; I always really wanted to do films. This is important and for this reason I produce all of my films with my father and my brother and I have control of the story and nobody says anything about it. Often the foreign distributors cut parts of my films and I really hate that - it makes me feel like a criminal when people cut my films. If you are in a museum and you see a painting that is maybe too dark, would you cut the painting? It's frustrating.

Your films have been heavily censored in North America but do they cut your films in Italy and Europe as well?

Yes, sometimes they cut them a little bit in France and in England and in Germany. In Scandinavia, people are very free, very lib-



Sat Pieces of Sadism: Argento combines splatter horror with dynamic aesthetics for elaborate murder sequences. *All from Suspiria (this page and facing page).*

eral. I remember a time when nobody from Scandinavia had seen my films and nobody knew my work. Finally, there was a change in the government and it went much more liberal and then suddenly my films were in the theatres and in the video stores and then everybody knew them. I would receive thousands of letters from Scandinavians and I realized my work had arrived.

Many of your films are exceedingly cruel and you have said before that you feel that reality is cruel. Why do you think there is cruelty in reality?

I don't like reality. There seems to be no poetry in it, absolutely none. When I read in the newspaper that something happened in the city, that someone was murdered by a cruel killer, for me there's no inspiration in that, it is not interesting to me. Reality is boring, cruel and a little bit stupid too. [laughs]





A Cruel Gaze

Art of Darkness: The Cinema of Dario Argento Chris Gallant, ed./FAB Press

While Dario Argento has a reputation on Western shores for making an artsy spectacle of a splatter film, Europeans – including the British – have been less content to dismiss him as easily. Argento's films are rife with psychologically charged imagery and themes, which is where much of this exhaustive volume turns its critical eye.

The recently released tome provides exhaustive and detailed coverage of Argento's entire oeuvre, up to and including 1998's *Phantom of the Opera*. The hefty book sets the stage with a slew of essays which situate Argento's violent films within the greater traditions of voyeuristic cinema (à la Peeping Tom), the Gothic heroine and the art philosophy of Edgar Allan Poe, among other treatments.

The second half of the book concerns itself with critical dissections of the entire Argento canon, with genre heavyweights taking turns highlighting important elements and motifs in each film. Editor Chris Gallant, who shoots for more ambitious/critical fare, is joined by Stephen Thrower (who tackles *Suspiria* and joins Chris Barber for *Tenebrae*), Kim Newman (who writes on *Four Flies on Grey Velvet*), Montreal's own Mitch Davis (who offers a personal take on *Inferno*) and some six others.

Art of Darkness is also jam-packed with colour and black and white pics, poster art and behind-the-scenes photos from all of Argento's films, including lesser known works like 1973's *Le Cinque Giornate*. Leaving no stone unturned, Gallant traces the master's touch in Italy's cinema of the extreme with examinations of Michele Sone's *La chiesa*, Sergio Stivaletti's *Wax Mask* and Lamberto Bava's *Demoni* among many others.

Although the seminal Argento book has been Maitland McDonagh's *Broken Mirrors, Broken Minds, Art of Darkness* is at the very least a worthy companion piece and a much needed critical update on Italy's greatest living horror director.

—Emma Anderson



Nightmare Fantasy: Suzy Banyon (Jessica Harper) wanders through a coloured dance school of tortured screams and (inset) strikes a classic pose in Argento's *Suspiria*.



The violence in your movies, you would say, is not based in reality at all?

Yes that's right.

The irony, of course, is that the murders are very realistic.

Yes and no. When you have someone getting killed in a movie it requires a lot of art – the blood, the lights, the camera and the whole effect. It is an artificial killing and it has nothing to do with reality.

You have also commented that murder in your movies is, for you, erotic and sensual. Sometimes yes.

Does that explain why many of the victims in your films tend to be women?

I don't know exactly. I think that comes from way back. My mother was a photographer and she was very famous for her portraits of famous women and actresses. And many times I remember I was in the studio with her and I saw her work – doing lights and makeup and everything – and the woman's face and body was always in the light, so these things stayed in my mind. Also, for me, it's much more comfortable to describe a woman's face or a woman's body but, again, I think that comes from when I was a child.

What is the difference between the way audiences perceive you in Europe and the way they perceive you in North America?

I think it's the same, actually. I was in America many times in the last six or seven years. I was in Los Angeles and Chicago and New York to speak at a university for a retrospective and I met many people from the audience and I saw that people are alike – they have the same reactions. The language of the

theatre and the images is international, it's everybody, it doesn't need walls or geography. It's just images, colour and audience and dreams and fantasies – these things are international. For this reason I think my films are received the same way in Italy and Japan. The places are far apart but the language is similar.

Suspiria began your witch trilogy which was followed with Inferno in 1980. Do you have plans of ever finishing it?

During the shooting of *Inferno* I wrote the third story, but I wasn't sure about it – there were many things I didn't like. So instead I did another film [*Phenomena*], but now I've been thinking of coming back to the trilogy.

There are rumours that you are planning to make another movie with George Romero. Is this true or not?

We have been talking about it, and we'd like to do something. We have an idea of working together, it would be a great thing for both me and George. We are very different in style but our sensibility is very close.

Would it be a zombie movie?

Yes it would be a zombie movie.

You've never done a zombie movie before, have you?

Well... we'll see! [laughs] I would probably collaborate on the screenplay and on the production, but George would probably shoot it. I don't know, maybe we would do two films

Goblin on Cinevox

Since 1996, Italian film music label Cinevox (distributed by Pick Up Records - <http://www.pickuprecords.it/> - but also available through mail order outlets) has been ambitiously revisiting their old catalogue of classic titles, among them, the soundtrack albums of prog-rockers Goblin, who provided the music for most of Dario Argento's classic horror films.

1975: Profondo Rosso (CD MDF-301)

Goblin's first score proved to be a landmark in film music. Dario Argento's pioneering approach in depicting violence as artful opera is still quite shocking today; the editing and colourful images are uniquely striking, but

Goblin's aggressive score fuses everything together into a heightened experience. The film's famous title track spent fifteen weeks on Italy's hit parade charts. Using a circular phrase, the piece builds to a Gothic crescendo and quietly fades away after returning to the opening bars. Goblin's rhythmic patterns are incredibly addictive, and it's no surprise Profondo Rosso has endured for so long. The 72-minute CD

includes film, album and alternate theme versions, plus Giorgio Gaslini's rich orchestral tracks that blend quite well with Goblin's contributions. Though originally produced in 1975, Profondo Rosso is a stunning recording, due to Giorgio Agazzi's close miking that delivers powerful stereo imaging. Cinevox has also reissued the original 7 album tracks on LP, and included an alternate version of Deep Shadows, discovered after the expanded CD release.

1977: Suspiria (CD MDF-305)

For their next Argento film, Goblin composed what can still be regarded as one of the most terrifying soundtracks for a horror film. Loud, dark and full of demonic imagery, Suspiria is lovingly crafted to fit Argento's lengthy and elaborate death montages, and when originally released, it budgeted audiences with loud, 4-track Dolby stereo. Suspiria has appeared several times on CD and LP over the years, with a few curious differences. The extra material on the new disc includes an alternate of Markos that features a longer percussion section, accompanied by bells and keyboards, and omits the high-pitched electronic notes used in the final film version. Additionally, Cinevox has added a few brief variations on the title track - including one with narration, and a more traditional rock into that was never used.

1978: Zombi/Dawn of the Dead (MDF-308)

With synthesizers featuring more prominently in their work, Goblin employed a wider array of electronic sounds for director George Romero. Dawn of the Dead (released as Zombi in Italy) was the director's second installment in his Dead trilogy, and though released in Italy with a Goblin score, for the North American version Romero replaced much of the band's material with "needle drop" cues from the Capitol Hi-Q and De Wolfe music libraries - music similar to the stock tracks in Night of the Living Dead. The Cinevox CD is the first time Goblin's score has appeared in

complete form, and offers their own musical interpretation of Romero's zombie apc. The film's title track is a synthesized pall of doom - an ascending mood piece of unrelenting percussion and bass, with a tongue-in-cheek haunted house theme performed on keyboards. Another dramatic highlight is Zombi, which uses heavy percussion, staccato keyboard

accents, and eerie background voices to evoke a looming parade of cannibalistic zombies. The bonus materials include a brief lounge version (!) of the Zombi cue, rock-oriented versions of the film's main titles, and the jazz fusion Supermarket cue.

1982: Tenebre (CD MDF-302)

Tenebre can best be described as a major transfer point in Goblin's evolution. Bounding on disco and eighties pop, the soundtrack is far removed from their early progressive rock scores, though the upbeat Tenebre theme does branch off into more moody territory with some ominous, sustained chords. In spite of the disco moments, there are some dramatic gems in the score, with Gemini a major highlight. After a Tangerine Dream-like intro, electric bass, congas and synth effects underscore the first murder in Argento's muddled mystery-slasher. The album version is the more satisfying, while the two included variations - a film and alternate film version - are shorter, with the former concentrating on the rhythmic passages, and the latter expanding the atmospheric synth segments. Slow Circus, meant to underscore the killer's demented flashbacks, plays like a sick music box that's slowly drowning in a shallow pool of water. A longer film version is also included.

1985: Phenomena (CD MDF-303)

When Dario Argento made Phenomena, Goblin had essentially ceased to exist, and though Claudio Simonetti (with Fabio Pigretti) was involved with the film's actual score, the final product is far removed from the progressive rock scores of the band's first two Argento films. In addition to several heavy metal songs, Argento had engaged guitarist Bill Wyman to compose a moody opening track (The Valley) that, ironically, is one of the few dramatically functional cues in the film's soundtrack. The original soundtrack album contained songs and a few score cuts. The new Cinevox CD presents Simonetti's score, with additional music co-composed with Pigretti, for the first time. Like their other expanded CDs, Cinevox have sequenced Phenomena's 16 tracks to minimize repetitiveness, but with six versions of the film's theme and three versions of The Wind (filling the disc to slightly more than 52 minutes), the score becomes quickly monotonous. It's a fine line a label has to walk when consumers demand more value for their money, but the realities of the available material make a 50-plus minute album a grating listening experience. That said, the new Phenomena CD offers a large amount of previously unreleased material, and thankfully the multiple variations can easily be programmed out. The six Phenomena theme variations, however, are a bit of a mixed bag, as we're treated to dance, music video, and alternate versions. The three film versions run less than two minutes, are merely connective pieces between scenes, and therefore lack definitive conclusions.

-Mark R. Hasan





Argento Redux

Dario Argento's World of Horror DVD

Synapse Films

What has become known as the definitive documentary on the master of Italian horror all long last makes its way to DVD. Dario Argento's *World of Horror* is a visual essay taking an in-depth look into his work, and what results is an informative "insider's" look at the marriage of technical expertise and the dark vision of a man who has won legions of fans around the world for over three decades. Covering everything from the nuts and bolts of filmmaking to the artistic process that spawns such endeavors, *World of Horror* will doubtless be of interest to both dedicated Argento fans (i.e. the staff of *Rue Morgue*) as well as people wanting to learn more about this truly unique filmmaker (a word of warning to the uninitiated: some of the film clips shown here are decidedly spoiler-laden).

Argento himself comes across as surprisingly humble for an artist, displaying an astonishing amount of humility towards his own work and abilities, even doubling aloud whether he has what it takes to make his then newest (circa 1986) film *Phenomena*. Much of the backbone of this documentary is set during the filming of that much-maligned cult classic (see *RUEM8*), which makes Argento's doubts even more poignant. At the same time the director confesses that he'd "be a pretty good murderer", having committed the act so many times in his work. Any time one of the infamous black-gloved shadowy figures that populate his world strikes, it is usually Argento himself, coming in a way that Hitchcock never imagined.

Writer/director Michele Soavi, a frequent Argento collaborator and fine filmmaker in his own right (La Chiesa, Dellamorte Dellamore) strikes a fine balance between interviews and on-set documentary. While a more up-to-date filmic look is desperately needed, Dario Argento's *World of Horror* will provide giallo fans with a look at the splatter master's golden age.

-Brad Abraham

together, but this is still in talks.

Sleepless is your new movie and it's yet another giallo film. Why has the giallo mystery story attracted you so much over the years?

Because it is an enigma and I like enigmas. I remember the story that is the spring of the giallo mystery - it's a tale by Edgar Allan Poe. Even the ones with Sherlock Holmes, these are very interesting stories. They give you something to think about. Really, I just like these kinds of stories.

Do you still read Poe?

Yes, of course. I don't read him every day but I know him very well. For me, he is the master; he is someone close to me who inspires me.

What stage or phase of your career would you say you are now in?

I want to tell stories that are more on the ground or in the head, not so much in the sky, you know what I mean? The head is full of craziness [laughs]. You can't imagine how much craziness there is in our heads, in our streets, in our buildings, in the cities, in families.

Do you mean less fantasy and more psychological?

Yes I suppose you could put it that way.

Most of your murder mysteries are resolved naturally when the murderer is uncovered. Suspria is, of course, one of the exceptions. Would you say that you do not believe in the supernatural?

It's difficult to say because I don't really believe in witchcraft or things like this because in my trip all around Europe I discovered many people who did this for a joke or for money. I never saw something that made me say "there is an example of magical fact." I don't believe at all in that kind of supernatural but I believe in God.

Would you say you are religious?

Yes, in my own way I am religious.

You've cast your daughter Asia in several of your films. In the Stendhal Syndrome, for example, she is raped and mutilated with a razor blade. Was it difficult for you to shoot those scenes?

Yes, it was very difficult.

Why did you do it then?

Because my imagination is a bastard! [laughs] My dreams at that time were about death but it was not because of my daughter, it was because of the story. When I write I just have the character in my mind and I follow him or her through the fantasy. And at



Women, Knives, Blood: Argento revisits classic themes in *Sleepless*

the end I have the reality, and the reality was that my daughter played this character. It was a terrible thing for me seeing these things, really. It's something I will never forget and I don't think I will repeat it ever again.

Looking back on it, do you nevertheless see it as a positive experience?

Yes it was good but these things were important, very, very important for the film. Other films are different, as are other characters and other stories.

You have worked in the cinema of violence for a long time now. Do you do it because you are still interested in it or do you do it because it is expected of you?

I don't do it because someone expects it of me. I work in this because it's my house - my cage too - but more my house. It is easy for me to have a dialogue with my dark side. I don't think everyone has this but I have it. I must tell what I have in my breast, what I have inside. For this reason not everybody likes my films or understands them, but the people who do like them know them well. I have a dialogue with my very profoundest dark fantasies and I describe this I open the door and there is an enormous landscape and I describe this landscape.

You have said before that you make your films to be loved. After all this time, do you feel loved?

Yes sometimes I feel loved because I see young people from every nation on the Web site. When I make an appearance I think I'm here to tell something very specific, and the moment somebody likes that thing they love me. ■



TERROR Comes to DVD

**For Big Budget Horror Classics,
Making it to Digital is a Monster Event**

by Mary-Beth Hollyer

Fans of *Hannibal* the Cannibal will have lots to rejoice over this upcoming August 21, when MGM releases *Silence of the Lambs* and *Hannibal* on DVD, both packed full of extras. Though *Hannibal* grossed huge at the box office, most would agree that *Silence of the Lambs* was far superior than its sequel. The reissues follow suit — *Silence* again wins out as a Special Edition DVD.

A brand new documentary titled *Inside the Labyrinth* is the stand-out feature on the *Silence of the Lambs* reissue and it includes interviews with all the majors from the cast and crew, and even some enlightening comments from veteran director Roger Corman. *Labyrinth* traces the film to society's fascination with serial killers and author Thomas Harris' inspiration for the *Hannibal* character, notably Ted Bundy and Ed Gein's real-life murder exploits. Insight and commentary is offered by cast and crew, including director Jonathan Demme and screenwriter Ted Tally but, unfortunately, none from Harris himself.

The disc also offers over twenty minutes of deleted scenes, much of it concentrating on banter between Anthony Hopkins' *Hannibal* and Jody Foster's Clarice Starling which serve to flesh out the relationship between the two characters a little more. "Our Billy wasn't born a killer, Clarice," *Hannibal* tells his nemesis in a particularly delicious moment. "He was made one from years of systematic abuse...."

I particularly enjoyed replaying a short deleted scene which features *Silence* killer Buffalo "It puts the lotion in the basket" Bill stitching up his dead flesh garment.

The other extras deliver the goods, for the most part, but a Making Of documentary circa 1991 comes off as redundant and might be better called a plot summary — recommended for novices only. Though promised in the package, the never-before-seen outtake reel was not included in our advance copy, so I can't comment on it. The disc also includes a photo gallery, collectible booklet, teasers and trailers, all tastefully rendered for the charming psycho inside you.

Designers of the *Hannibal* DVD did not use as much restraint, adding every conceivable bonus they could think up in two discs. Looks great on paper, but, as with the film, the extras do not dig very deep. The documentary, *Breaking the Silence*, is literally broken up into five somewhat lackluster segments — development, production, special effects, music and reaction. The special effects segment gets the big prize — seeing Ray Liotta getting rigged up to eat his brains is quite the treat and though the rest of the featurette does not offer the nitzy-gritty facts you would expect from a documentary, stylistically it is a beautiful piece of work, with sweeping panoramic shots of Florence and its architecture.

Also included in the package is a less impressive alternate ending in which *Hannibal* gives Clarice a wet farewell before making his getaway. The discs also boast 35 minutes of deleted and alternate scenes, an option for over-dubbed commentary from Ridley Scott on the film (which is actually pretty cool), a multi-angle featurette on the art of storyboarding (great if you're an aspiring filmmaker), a five-angle breakdown of the fish market scene, exploration of the opening title design, trailers, tv spots, rare production stills, unused poster concepts, and more. Needless to say, *Hannibal* on DVD is quite the commitment but if you've got a soft spot for big budget cannibalism, you'll want to break out the fava beans and the Chianti.



CARRIE

Also on the reissue schedule for August 28 is Brian De Palma's 1976 horror shocker *Carrie*, which of course, was based on a young Stephen King's first novel. The Special 25th Anniversary Edition DVD pays the movie due credit with a veritable truck or train bag of goodies, including two 45-minute documentaries, a featurette on *Carrie* the Musical, an animated photo gallery, the original theatrical trailer, and notes detailing the evolution from King's book to de Palma's cinematic triumph.

The first documentary, *Acting Carrie*, is particularly eye-opening and includes interviews with the cast as they look back on the shoot. A few highlights: Sissy Spacek insisted on being involved in every scene, including the final dream sequence with Amy Irving — it was, in fact, Spacek's freckled hand that reached out from the grave. Piper Laurie, who played Carrie's mother, talks about the agony of the crucifixion scene which had her pinned up in various stances for an entire day. And Betty Buckley, the gym teacher, had no idea that her character would be killed off until it actually happened.

But it is Brian De Palma's exploration of his vision in *Visualizing Carrie* that will intrigue long-standing fans. "Everything was worked out like a musical score," he says, referring in part to his use of split screens — revolutionary at the time — during Carrie's prom night rampage. De Palma gives a good sense of how the film evolved through trial and error — Carrie's home was supposed to be showered with stones for the end scene, but the stones looked like rain on camera, so he decided to torch the house instead.

Sorcery missed, however, is commentary from Stephen King, who is only represented through notes on the history of his book and its eventual adaptation to the big screen. Surprises like Betty Buckley's commentary on *Carrie* the Musical somewhat make up for it, though — Buckley played the mother in the stage version of *Carrie*.

The DVD will also include the standard offerings, like options for original mono or stereo sound and several language choices (dubbed or subtitled).



A quiet sit down dinner... *Hannibal* style.



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The reissue boom just got another boost in the wake of the DVD revolution and companies like ANCHOR BAY ENTERTAINMENT are delivering the goods in a way fans only dreamed of a decade ago.

SKIN SHOW

A LOOK BACK AT **MANIAC** William Lustig's Cinema of the Extreme

by Rod Gudino

Maniac is a notorious sleaze classic, which has had a colourful history of being heavily censored and banned throughout the world. The directorial debut of William Lustig, *Maniac* tells the cheerless story of Frank Zito, a pot-bellied, pock-marked killer who resides in a dingy apartment in New York city, occasionally venturing forth into the grimy streets to realize some of the most grisly murders ever captured on the red screen. Often represented as a showcase for gory effects, *Maniac*'s effective portrayal of Zito raises it above the mark of its murder set pieces to something approaching, perhaps even realizing, artful suspense.

A decidedly low-budget independent effort, *Maniac* superseded all expectations when it managed to so thoroughly disturb its audience. In the twenty-one years since its initial release, its reputation has become legendary, largely through the unyielding backlash of its critics. To this day, the movie continues to be lambasted as "vile and repulsive," "completely devoid of any moral perspective," and "a film that revels in its sleaziness."

As one of the most offensive slasher films ever made, *Maniac* drew more than its share of horror fans on its rise to the status of ultimate video nasty, but even they found it hard to digest. Undoubtedly complimenting it, splatter fans have called it "a truly gruesome, sick picture," "dark and ugly," and "nausea in the most literal sense of the word." Even Tom Savini, who gained much from his special effects work on the film, at one time tried to publicly distance himself from it. Tellingly, he still refers to his work on *Maniac* as his goriest ever.

Adding to the movie's notoriety was William Lustig himself who, though only twenty-four at the time, had already helmed two adult features (*Hot Honey* and *The Violation of Claude*) under the pseudonym Billy Bagg. The implication was there that *Maniac*'s detailed scenes of disfigurement and dismemberment of women could be readily explained as the product of a misogynist pornographer.



Love At First Fright "If I had to list the attributes of *Maniac*, certainly Joe would be number one," says director William Lustig, of his leading actor.

In fact, Lustig admits that he did draw from his experience in the adult film industry in crafting his vision (see below), which he says was conceived as an extreme picture that would go where no other film had gone before.

"We felt that we should be doing what the audiences wanted but the studios were not delivering," he says, recalling other genre outlaws like H.G. Lewis and Lloyd Kaufman.

Lustig was joined in his project by Joe Spinell, whose portrayal of the scruffy Zito bordered on the uncanny along with actors like Caroline Munro and effects man Savini. In the end, there is no arguing that the violent reaction to this violent film is a testament to

the competence of its filmmakers in portraying a week in the life of one of the worst serial killers imaginable.

Spinell passed away in 1989 midway through a sequel, tentatively titled *Mr. Robber*, which he was pursuing on his own. Lustig went on to a film career that included *Figliose*, *Maniac Cop* and, most recently, *Uncle Sam*. Currently, he is one of the heads at Anchor Bay Entertainment and oversees title production for the company. The DVD reissue will include a 45-minute featurette on Spinell, who holds the dubious honour of having portrayed one of horror cinema's most underrated psychopaths.

Rue Morgue spoke with William Lustig in May.

"If you're going to make an exploitation film, make it an exploitation film... Don't sugar coat it, don't try to make it something that it isn't, just go for it."

-William Lustig

Maniac has had a complicated release history, primarily because it has been censored so many times. Years ago, however, it was released on both laser disc and DVD. How will this release be different?

The first DVD was basically the laser disc on DVD. I've gone back now and totally remastered *Maniac* from the ground up. This time I haven't cut the film to suit my tastes. Back when I was first editing *Maniac*, we were forced to put the first reel or two into sound editing, to make our Cannes Film Festival deadline, and I never was able to fully trim the first couple of reels in the film. There was also a scene that I questioned why we did - it was Joe Spinell and Caroline Munro having dinner. And that was also in the final film. And I decided when we were doing the laser disc that I would cut the film to the way I really wanted it but a lot of people objected to it because they obviously liked the scene with Joe and Caroline. So I decided for this new DVD that I would release the film just as it was released theatrically, so I've made no cuts to the film, it's all here, all 88 minutes of it. Also we've remixed the audio in a true Dolby 5.1 in addition to a DTS 6.1, so the audio on there which came from the original magnetic track for the film is state of the art. And I also got THX certified transfer with the audio. The biggest development, however, is that we have a featurette which is on a separate DVD because of its running time. The featurette is about Joe Spinell and about his career, his life and includes interviews with people who have worked with him. I've always thought that Joe's life deserved its own movie. Joe was a man who definitely lived life to its fullest in terms of making every day an adventure. He was a guy who created and attracted some of the most bizarre characters in the world and he was very colourful and somewhat tragic. I felt like I wanted to make this new edition of *Maniac* a tribute to him.

Many critics have remarked on how well Joe Spinell captured the character of Frank Zito and really, it seems the film owes a lot of its strength to his performance.

If I had to list the attributes of *Maniac*, certainly Joe would be number one. Joe spent a



great deal of time researching the character, and one of the things that affected me about working with him was seeing how he took people around him and incorporated them into the character. I had an apartment office at the time we made the picture, and it over-looked a courtyard looking into another apartment building, and there was a young boy who sat at the edge of the bed for most of the day, walking back and forth with his upper body just rocking back and forth. Joe used to watch him and incorporated that into the character on those moments when Frank is walking back and forth beside the bed.

What struck me so much about Maniac is how Joe's character manages to elicit sympathy, despite his outrageous acts of cruelty. You don't really get that in the genre despite the fact that the story - of a killer on the loose in an urban setting - continues to be quite common.

That's because these other characters - the Jansons and Michael Myers - are faceless evil and here evil has a face on it. The reality is that when you set aside the despicable acts of some of these people, they are human. I'm sure there are people in this life who love Timothy McVeigh and if you got to know somebody like that and could put out of your mind what that person did, there may be aspects of him that you may find genuinely appealing. That to me is why, to me, evil is not so black and white. There's a reality to it.

Do you have fond memories of the shoot or was it a difficult experience?

Well I have fond memories because I guess when you have a very difficult, challenging



Gore Gore. The infamous shotgun scene (above) and more effects from *Seven* (next).

experience like making this picture, if you get through it successfully, you look back fondly on it! [laughs] It was, at the time, almost insurmountable to get through, mainly because we had no money at all. I mean, we made the film with \$48,000 and there were every day obstacles, challenges, you name it. Every day things came up that made me think "this is the end." At the time I just wanted to get through the day. We'd run out of money and we'd have to pay the crew and miracles would happen. We were making this movie hand to mouth and it was enormously difficult.

Obviously the special effects continue to be a big part of the film's success. How much of it did you write around Tom Savani's work?

A great deal of it was written around what Tom had available to him. I wish I could remember back to some of the things that we were originally going to do in the film, but I know when Tom came aboard it definitely affected the things that we did. Tom brought his imagination but we also, in some cases, used props he had from previous films because, again, we had no money. So we did to a great extent work around what he had.

I suppose that would include the infamous shotgun sequence. Practically every person who has ever reviewed Maniac has referred to that scene as either an amazingly rendered effects sequence or one of the most disgusting things they have ever seen in a movie.

[laughs] That's so funny because I remember shooting that very vividly, and incidentally, I do recall that being in the original script. It was what it was: we shot a live, fully-loaded, double-barrelled shotgun and Tom was doubling Joe Spinell on the hood of the car, shooting his own head. And I remember shooting that on location - I don't

RUE MORQUE's DVD WISH LIST

Compiled by
Brad Abraham
John Bowen
Tom Dragomir
Gary Pullin

Not unlike the Riddle of the Sphinx, one of the eternal questions plaguing humankind is "Why is it that there are millions of copies of Charlie's Angels available on DVD, yet not a single copy of *Dead Alive*?" Now that the release trend is in full swing, it only seemed right for us to put together a sampling of what we feel needs to be released and soon, before we're forced to cope with Charlie's Angels 2. Call it an early Xmas wish list... Santa, are you listening?

1 DELLAMORTE DELLAMORE (1993)

Schooled by Lamberto Bava, Dario Argento and Lucio Fulci, director Michele Soavi has personalized this beautifully shot film with a touch of magic and heavy doses of black humour. The plot can be convoluted (like most Italian films), but it's got miles of style. Extras should include commentary by director Soavi and maybe a report card from his teachers. International Poster art and a doc on the set and makeup designs would make this a real foreign treat. -GP

2 THE DEVILS (1971)

Flamboyant and very, very disturbing. *The Devils* is simply one of those movies you have to see at least once: A remastered DVD of Russell's director's cut (available on video in the UK), with commentary from the director (and Cinematographer/future director Nicholas Roeg) would ease our pain. Additional comments from the traditionally loopy Vanessa Redgrave would no doubt be interesting. -BA

3 ED WOOD (1994)

Tim Burton has been revisiting his films on DVD, and a special edition *Ed Wood* would doubtless be welcomed by horror fans everywhere. A director's commentary (and a cast commentary for that matter), trailers, behind the scenes - whatever - will give this film the respect that eluded the real Ed Wood in life. -BA

4 THE FRIGHTENERS (1996)

The ultra-rare Universal Special Edition LD of Peter Jackson's cult film has yet to see an appearance on DVD... we mere mortals have to settle with the movie-only version. The Special Edition would feature deleted scenes, a longer cut of the film and apparently four hours of behind the scenes documentaries, special effects tests, commentary track, cast tests, you name it. -BA

5 THE HAUNTING (1963)

Forget the remake (like you haven't already!). This Robert Wise directed film perfectly captures the blood curdling dread of Shirley Jackson's classic novel. A commentary from Wise would be a welcome treat, along with a documentary theatrical trailer. A cool "Easter Egg" (that's "Hidden Features" for DVD neophytes) could be "remake" helmer Jan DeBont apologizing to us all for his overpriced travesty. -BA

6 KING KONG (1933)

Why the hell does Kong have yet to see the light of day? Not only is it a landmark marriage of state of the art (for 1933) special effects and classic storytelling, it is one of those rare films that still succeeds in transporting the viewer to a world they have never seen before. A DVD re-release of the old Criterion LD would be easy enough to put together. A gallery of stills, movie posters and perhaps a documentary with Willis O'Brien protégé Ray Harryhausen sounding off on Kong's importance to cinema would be this cool. -BA



7 RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD (1985)

If the horror gods are with us, sometime in the near future (I'll one day be slowly creaking open the embossed deluxe ROTLD coffin box. A look inside would uncover three 8"X10" glossy prints of the original American as well as the cool French and German movie posters. Anamorphic widescreen presentation will finally do visual justice to Linnea Quigley's painted-up, half-naked, T&A. Bonus features would include original trailers and TV spots, as well as deleted scenes, outtakes and commentary from O'Bannon. Also - and this is an absolute must - the disc's flipside would contain the full impossible-to-find soundtrack featuring, among others, music from The Cramps and The Damned. -TD

8 SCANNERS (1981)

Doesn't anyone remember this creepy little thriller? You should. It featured the most intense exploding head scene since Savin's max of pig guts and applause. Easily one of Cronenberg's most suspense-driven films, the DVD was dropped from an April 2000 release from MGM. Imagine the twisted delight the Gore-mat and other nut-jobs (like me) would have freeze-framing those glorious melon-bursts! Extras should include a crisp transfer, trailers and commentary by Cronenberg, perhaps discussing the power of the mind rather than the (grotesque) beauty of the body. -GP

9 THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE (1973)

This pivotal and punishing lo-fi classic certainly would benefit from a serious digital overhaul - grainy and poorly lit, it's almost impossible to watch on a small screen - but that's just for starters. The behind-the-scenes horrors of TCM's troubled production are the stuff of legend, and yet the actors have explained comparatively little about their obviously antagonistic feelings toward director Tobe Hooper. Twenty-six years later, why not finally clear the air? Of course, the ideal DVD would also give the reclusive Hooper equal time, providing that he actually wanted it. -JWB

And list but certainly not least...

10 THE WES CRAVEN BOX OF SHAME

We'd also like to propose a three-disc boxed set of *Deadly Friend*, *Shocker* and *The People Under the Stairs*. Just imagine: each film with its own full-length documentary featuring Wes Craven - an often good and occasionally great director - explaining in detail the unfortunate circumstances that caused him to sink so very low during the twelve years that lapsed between *A Nightmare on Elm Street* and *Scream*. The floor would be thrown open to Wes to complain, apologize or point the finger (and he's certainly done all of the above on various occasions). -JWB

know why we did it on-location, looking back on the scene we could have easily gone some place more private. Of course, firing a live shot-gun in New York city is a problem, but of course we didn't have any money to do any kind of effects otherwise. So, when we did the scene we had a car - actually the prop car for Spinel, the Buick Electra - we had it standing by with the trunk open and as soon as Tom fired the shotgun which, by the way, the force of the shotgun threw him off the front of the car backwards - if you watch the scene and you don't look at the head but you look through the windshield you'll see the feet of Tom Savini come out from under him and he literally flew backwards. We grabbed the shotgun from Tom who was lying on the ground in pain, and we threw it in the trunk of the car and said, "okay, head for New Jersey!" That was the spirit of making the picture.

Did the atavistic you formed during your years in the adult film industry influence the extreme nature of Maniac?

Yes it did, in one respect. I recall a meeting I once had with a famous pornographer at his office, who criticized my adult films as being too mainstream, maybe even vanilla. And he looked at me across his desk and he said, "you know, the secret to success in this business is, if there's something that really appeals, something that you don't want your family to ever see, something that you think would make audiences cringe, shoot it." And the fact is that, although he was talking about pornography - and I noticed that, even in his recent video films, the guy does exactly that - I did apply it to *Maniac* and I did apply it to *Pigfiance*. If you're going to make an exploitation film, make it an exploitation film, you know? Don't sugar coat it, don't try to make it something that it isn't, just go for it. If that's the kind of film you're making, make sure you deliver what the audience wants and more. And that - to varying degrees - has always been my approach to every film that I do, it's always been my thinking.

Did Maniac hinder your career in any way?

Well at that time I had no career, so how can you hinder something that doesn't exist? [laughs] It was a very interesting thing, because *Maniac* got a lot of fans from the weirdest places. I was flown to California by William Friedkin who had seen *Maniac* and continues to this day to consider it one of the most terrifying horror film experiences that he's ever seen. There were quite a few fans of the film from the strangest places. And of course, on the other hand the film certainly wasn't going to get me any mainstream work but nor was I looking for it. I have always been a self-starter. I am not a good employee. I am always better when I work for myself, so it was always my intention to produce my own picture so I was never really trying to gain acceptance from anybody - I really didn't care. Actually, I kind of found it neat when people were appalled. I'll never forget the thrill I had when the then-heads of Universal and the head of production walked out of the movie. I showed it to Roger Corman and he watched the first and the last reel and he looked up from his desk to me and he said cut the film to an R and I'll distribute it. I've had quite a lot of fun experiences with the movie. I also remember showing it to AIP who refused to let me in the screening room and I had nowhere to go so I sat in their editing room and there was a print of a then-unknown film called *Mad Max*, which I started watching on the editing machine reel by reel and I thought, "aw man, this is fucking neat!" So even after they flashed screening my movie I didn't even bother going in to talk to the guy - I wanted to finish watching *Mad Max*! [laughs].

Do you make a point of reading the critical literature that has amassed around Maniac?

Oh yeah, I read all that stuff, sure. Most of it, of course, is negative! [laughs]

Does it bother you that it is?

Here's the way I really look at it: I'm a high-school dropout who was driving an auto parts truck and drove a taxi. I read *Variety*, I had an ambition to make movies, and I made a fuckin' movie that played every country in the world and has been dubbed in six or seven different languages and I'm sitting here twenty years later and the film is being resuscitated again in a special edition. At the end of the day, how can I complain about jack shit? I'm not offended by what critics say, I'm just amazed the film got finished and that there was a movie for people to write negative reviews of. Of course, I would love to have all positive reviews. Who wouldn't? On the other hand, I say, Jesus, at least it's being written about! What is really funny is that when I see reviews coming from foreign publications, there are all these rave reviews. The film was recently shown at the Cinematheque Francaise and there was a reviewer who called me who was going on and on about the look of the film and when I took a look at the print that they had screened over there, I realized that the colour had faded. I don't know what to say, I just find it all interesting. ♫



Manic-Eyed Maniac. From the first scenes, late actor Joe Spinell inhabited the character of Frank Zito completely

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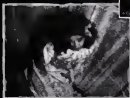
THE MOST FRIGHTENING PLACES ARE WITHIN YOU

by Gregorius Chant

I don't know where the Haverghast Asylum is located, but I have a pretty good idea of what it looks like. It's tall and imposing and the drab light from its windows gives it a melancholy countenance. There are iron gates out front and a low fog creeps through the trees in the evening. Inside, the walls are dank and unwashed, like the flesh of a corpse, and the darkness that settles there at night is the darkness of madness and despair.

Such is the image that rises from the eerie music of *Midnight Syndicate*, a duo of soundscape artists who specialize in places both sinister and strange. Their latest creation is called *Gates of Delirium* (see *RM#21*), and it's a morbid expedition into the Haverghast Asylum, a place within your imagination that only those with a strong heart are encouraged to venture into.

"Haverghast Asylum really only exists in the mind of the listener and, really, what we're doing is trying to transport you into this imaginary world that you create," says Edward Douglas, one of the two composers behind *Midnight Syndicate*'s macabre symphonies. "I would equate the *Midnight Syndicate* experience to being lost in the middle of a forest at night. It can be a pretty intense experience because your imagination fills in the things you can't see or explain. With our CDs, we provide the forest and allow the listener's imagination to do the rest."



Haverghast: From the latest album by Midnight Syndicate.



Working from concepts to music, Douglas and fellow anxiety architect Gavio Goszka first developed the *Midnight Syndicate* sound with an album called *Born of the Night*, which was based around the ghostly and gothic artwork of fellow Cleveland artist Joseph Varga. Inspired by the drawings, the duo created their first aural landscape of horror, dark, orchestral, instrumental music with a heavy choir that evoked Varga's cursed graveyards and pale-faced specters.

For *Realm of Shadows*, their second album (see *RM#17*), *Midnight Syndicate* envisioned the ruins of a village that had been abandoned to an unspeakable horror, a plague perhaps, or maybe something worse. The music naturally reflected a more medieval and gothic sensibility, and made the duo a huge hit at fairs and theme parks which showcased their music in haunted houses and spookshows. The added exposure set the stage for their third, and most ambitious, effort.

"For *Gates of Delirium* I definitely had in mind this idea of a turn-of-the-century asylum," says Douglas. "And for this, I pulled upon images that I had seen in horror films, like *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, as well as my experiences researching and visiting asylums of the period. I picked the turn-of-the-century because that is probably the scariest period in mental health history as far as the techniques used. I think there are a lot more tense pieces on the album, but that's what we were going for; the soothing followed by the frantic, indicative of the asylum atmosphere."

Hearing Douglas talk about his musical influences — John Carpenter ("certainly a heavy influence"), Denay Elftman ("probably our biggest single influence"), Wojciech Kilar, Hans Zimmer, Elliot Goldenthal — is like remembering two decades worth of classic hair-raising moments. Like many people, Douglas was attracted as much to the sounds as he was to the sights of his favourite horror films.

"I really enjoyed closing my eyes and letting the music fill my head with images," he says. "When it was time for me to produce my own music, I felt that instrumental based music lent itself a little better to that, because without lyrics the interpretation of the music is entirely up to the listener and people picture entirely different things."

Ghost stories, horror films and gothic imagery were where Douglas and Goszka turned to for inspiration, perfecting a brand of uneasy music that is rare in the genre.

"I think when you're into horror as much as I am, when you start to create, that just comes naturally," says Douglas. "I don't ever think, okay, it's time to write a dark piece — it just comes out."

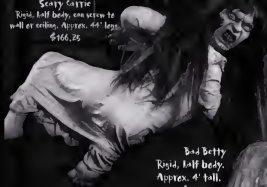
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Jason X

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New Line Pictures

It's been eight months now that we gave you our on-set report of *Jason X* (see *RM* 119), the botchy anticipated tenth installment in the *Friday the 13th* series. And although the film was supposed to come out sometime last Halloween, we've been since saddled with press releases and e-mails stating that the date has been pushed back again and again. Delays have put the film in theatres January 2001, then March, then April. The latest word is that you can expect to be seeing *Jason X* "sometime in 2002".

Frankly, we're tired of waiting, as we're sure you are. In an effort to go that extra step for our readers, *Rue Morgue* actually secured a copy of *Jason X*, which we previewed at our offices for the entire staff and have now decided to review. So how does Crystal Lake's favourite masked psycho fare in space?

Well, let's get to the story first: Jason (Hodder) and a scientist (Doig) are cryogenically frozen and thawed some four hundred years in the future by a bunch of archeology students, their teacher and an android (Ryder) who resembles more Seven of Nine from *Voyager* and less Pris from *Blade Runner*. Anyway, after some thirty minutes of exposition and a scene in which David Cronenberg gets snuffed during his cameo, Jason returns to begin some PG-friendly mayhem, while the survivors are picked off one by one as they try to escape the spaceship. Basically, *Jason X* is a pop-up version of *Alien*, or better yet, *Alien: Resurrection* (a fatal mistake, as



Lost in Space: A recently thawed Jason searches the ship for fresh victims and (insult) director Jim Isaac contemplates Jason's unenviable future.

everyone knows that *Alien* is the one you want to rip off). Add it all up and you've got one seriously bad movie.

That said, *Jason X* wouldn't be so utterly dismal if it weren't for a few serious flaws. One: there are way too many characters for the story to work, and all of them act like they've stepped off the set of *Star Trek: Voyager*. Two: Jason backs his way through the spaceship until he gets killed (his head sheared off with a shotgun), but then he's resurrected by an intergalactic coffee maker and becomes a Terminator-like creature

affectionately called @berJason. Cool body suit, but the really dumb transition spoils a lot of the fun. Third, the film isn't over the top enough or clever enough to work as a parody or a send up, which it should have been. And fourthly, *Jason X* is about as frightening as an episode of *Back Rogers*.

So okay, hate us. Half of you were none too pleased when we threw some mud in Jason's eye for our Special Issue, and the other half got pissed because we decided to even give him the time of day. *Rue Morgue* has nothing against *Friday the 13th* – in fact, many of us over here are big fans. But even the most dedicated ones among us agreed that the new film is well beyond our worst expectations.

This review wouldn't be complete without at least one spoiler, so here it is: Jason gets snuffed in the end when he and Sergeant Brodski – a schmuck who doubles as a Navy Seal and has more lives than a cat – get stuck in a spaceship rigged with explosives. The bombs go off, sending Jason into space, knife in hand, but then he's tackled in mid-flight by the sergeant – yup, you read that right – and steered towards a planet. Both burn up in the atmosphere. The end.

So what now? Todd McFarlane has pulled his Jason doll from his upcoming *Movie Maniacs 4* as New Line continues to shuffle the release date and the fans swap anticipations on the *Friday the 13th* newsgroups. Our take? At least one person at New Line has clued into the fact that the film's a dog and they're trying to see how best to unload it. Maybe they'll re-edit it or tack some extra footage onto it, or maybe they'll just shut it up in the vaults and release it five years from now as a lost classic. Whatever they do, the future looks bleak. Take it from us; *Jason X* sucks yesterday, today and tomorrow.

—Emma Anderson



Fun Dead Things: Horrific goodies from *The Forsaken*

A TASTE FOR BLOOD

The Forsaken

Starring Kerr Smith, Brendan Fehr and Johnathon Schaech
Written and directed by J.S. Cardone
Screen Gems

Vampires can no longer be called the living dead. After decades of artistic butchery (did the descent begin with Rice's *Queen of the Damned*?), they shall be known henceforth as the pretty-damn-near-killed dead. This genre is so tired, it's a cliché complaining about how tired it is. So, did we really need another bloodsucker movie while untapped screenplay genres languish in some creatively stunted executive's discard file? Not at all. So why did I enjoy *The Forsaken*?

It couldn't have been originality, because this movie had little to none of that. Young lad picks up convertible in L.A. to deliver to owner in Florida. He gives a lift to a hitchhiker somewhere in the badlands, who turns out to be a vampire hunter, in pursuit of one of the very first vampires. Along the way, they discover one of the predator's victims before she's had a chance to "turn." Chivalry and gunplay collide in a final showdown of not-quite-Bruckheimer proportions.

Was it the performances? Nah. While none of the players embarrassed themselves, I didn't see anything here that surpassed *Killing Mr. Griffin*, a film that I rightfully execrated sometime last year (you can still find the corpse at your local Blockbuster).

Then how about the script, the action, the gore? Well, now that you mention it, yes. And you can add cinematography in there as well. First of all, director Cardone (who also penned the screenplay) has a rather vicious sensibility. I'm inviting unwarranted body cavity searches by saying this, but I was rather impressed with how neatly he dispatched a state trooper midway through the flick. I also liked the opening sequence, with

nubile Euro-hotie Izabella Miko washing blood off her well-proportioned breasts – a rare sight in theatre-released horror geared to the prepubescent set.

Mind you, the script had problems (what was with the phantom flashers in the other convertible, and why can't a nine-hundred-year-old knight afford a new mauler?), but it also had its visceral moments and a few laughs along the way. The Anti-och-origin of the vampires was well-composed, if not particularly original. And the picture looked good, with a not-too-contrived indie feel.

In short, *The Forsaken* is nothing you haven't seen before (think *Near Dark*), but if you liked it the first time, you'll like it this time as well. There may be no garlic in sight and there's plenty of cheese (the Swiss variety with lots of holes), but nonetheless this one turned out to be quite tasty.

—Eric Sparring

BODY SOAP, PLEASE

If I Die Before I Wake

Starring Stephanie Jones, Muse Watson and Michael McCleery
Written and directed by Brian Katkin
Artisan Home Entertainment

Rape revenge films, rape dramas, call em' what you want, these films are one of the blackest spots on the horror movie industry. Despite their ongoing notoriety, I've read few positive reviews for *The Last House on the Left* (although I admit I have respect for the film), and even fewer for *I Spit on Your Grave*. But there are some bright spots in this inky well, like *Ms. 45*, which got behind some of the psychology of rape and which shows us the nightmare without glorifying it. *If I Die Before I Wake* does not strictly fall into this category, but its scenes



NOT SO PRETTY IN RED

Cut

Starring Molly Ringwald, Jessica Napier and Simon Bessell
Directed by Kimble Rendall
Written by Dave Warner
Lions Gate Films Home Entertainment

Cut takes yet another stab at the seemingly never-ending self-referential slasher genre, and is the only Australian contribution of which I've ever heard. Director Kimble Rendall shows strong admiration for Wes Craven as his film is basically an amalgamation of *New Nightmare's* horror-villain-come-to-life plot with *Scream's* self-conscious humour. Unfortunately *Cut* has one of the imagination of the former nor the intelligence of the latter. *Cut*, in fact, is a ridiculous movie.

The premise? 1985, when slasher films were still at the top of the horror genre, a little film called *Hot Blooded* is doomed, and not only because the lead heroine is played by Molly Ringwald, the voice of Generation X. The actor portraying lead villain Scarm loses his cool and murders his director when he is fired from the set, and it's up to Ringwald to take her role a little more seriously and save the day. So the film is never finished, and it seems a curse has taken up a partnership with *Hot Blooded*, as every time the film is screened, somebody dies.

Fast-forward to the present and, naturally enough, someone decides to finish the film with predictable results. People on set start dying at the hands of a real-life Scarm – why, we never know. Scarm is supposedly "the creative force of the film come to life," but why this situation has befallen *Hot Blooded* and not every other horror film known to man remains a mystery.

Like I said before, *Cut* is a pretty ridiculous film. It tries to come off as self-referential, but the real humour comes from ludicrous scenarios like a guy getting shot through the throat with an arrow, only to come back in the end to save the day, arrow still intact. Not to mention that everyone is way too quick to conclude who Scarm really is, and way too quick to accept that fact. Come to think of it, the funniest thing about *Cut* is that it is actually being peddled as Australia's answer to *Scream*.

—Aaron Lupton



of rape are overwhelming and the same overall aura of sickness is strong enough to land it a spot in filmdom's most despised division. Concurrently, it is also one of the better of sad entries.

The action and horror begins immediately for a 16-year-old girl, when three degenerates lead by *I Know What You Did Last Summer*'s Hook Man (Muse Watson) break into her family's home and decide they'll spend the night. A humiliating series of tortures on mom, dad and brother ensue, with dad eventually getting offed, brother being raped and knifed (not in that order), and mom getting raped in a particularly disturbing and emotionally draining moment. Most of the genuinely distressing scenes take place in the first thirty minutes, leaving the rest of the film to chronicle the heroine's attempt to free her sister and herself from a fate truly worse than death. While James Bond heroics do happen, the film benefits from keeping those aspects to a minimum while using

effective pacing and imaginative yet authentic scenarios to create some of the more suspenseful moments in recent memory.

I Die Before I Wake is surprisingly effective for a low-budget direct-to-vid. Just like classic suburban-home-under-threat movies is *The Hills Have Eyes*, the comfortable surroundings are what make the events that much more sickening, striking a nerve in those of us who grew up in the sanctity of the 'burbs. Jones' performance as a tragic victim whose entire life is destroyed in one night is excellent, while Watson sucks us in and earns our disgust as a villain to contend with. Easily one of the best surprises I've had from direct-to-video in some time, *If I Die...* is grimy, provoking horror, the kind that shies away from the supernatural and gets inside your head with images that most of us hope we'll never have to actually see.

-Aaron Lupton



THE GORE ZONE

Catacombs

Starring Abe Dyer, Ari Bavel and Rico Love

Written and directed by Todd Sheets
Eclipse Video

I'll be honest in saying that I had never heard of Todd Sheets prior to viewing *Catacombs*, but judging by what I just lay witness to, this guy's one to watch for. *Catacombs* is a very ambitious amateur supernatural/gore flick shot on location at the *Catacombs Haunted House* in Kansas City, Sheets' place of occupation. Some occasionally creepy moments, intentionally hilarious performances, puke-in-your-lip gore effects, and an extreme metal soundtrack are all part and parcel of one of the craziest indie roller coaster rides this year.

The action begins when Professor West invites seven students to spend a weekend in the haunted attraction for a study in fear. We have the psychology student, the erotic horror buff, the fan-boy, the scream queen, and other characters chosen for various reasons. But it's not long before the blood begins to flow, as a mystery man in a Michael Myers mask and a black rocker wig begins butchering the guests in ways only seen at the European meat market.

I'll be honest with you again, *Catacombs* is not a brilliant film. The plot exists only as an excuse for the intense bloodletting. We are never told why the Professor (of what, I don't know) wishes to conduct his study, nor is it explained how he intends to obtain his results. *Catacombs* is merely 90 minutes of people splitting up and walking through hallways, exchanging extremely funny dialogue until they meet their gruesome demise. And trust me, there's enough gross-

HOW TO TURN 20 MINUTES OF RAW FOOTAGE INTO AN 84 MINUTE MOVIE

My Crepuscul

Starring Eric James, Tom Colbert and Julie Hicks

Written and directed by Michael T. Schneider
Bloody Fun Pictures



In 1968, the most influential low budget horror film of all time was shot in a small town in Pittsburgh PA - and if you're lost, please roll up this magazine and beat yourself in the face with it until you bleed and/or pass out. But I digress. I guess you might say Michael T. Schneider, director of low-budget horror film *My Crepuscul* is a little like George Romero. They both come from Steeltown and they both apparently had enough passion and limited means to actually shoot their own horror movie.

But, for the moment, the comparisons stop there. As an actual movie, *My Crepuscul* is either an agonizing foray into the fractured psyche of a man consumed by his own cerebral deterioration, or just a good excuse to randomly splice together some homebrew FX with a little kitchen sink gore for kicks. Whatever the case, it's basically a great student film posing as a low-rent, Italian style art-house horror oeuvre. And while deciphering the plot takes a keen imagination, it seemingly chronicles the downward spiral of depraved, voyeuristic mental patient turned psycho killer.

Suicide, necrophilia, paranoia, hallucination and demonization all play a part in the resulting schizophrenic tapestry. But watching it play out in jump cuts, layered dissolves and endlessly looped footage running forwards and back is akin to smashing your teeth into the coffee table for ninety minutes. In fact, a lot of *My Crepuscul* really reminded me of certain projects I shot in high school and university. They were well done considering their absolute lack of budget, but were mostly good for the experience factor and for impressing friends.

My Crepuscul would make for a stunning cerebral horror short, but in a feature-length world, it must be judged alongside *Night of the Living Dead*, which makes it seem like a technical nightmare and mostly agonizing to sit through. Interestingly, the definition of *crepuscul* in medical dictionaries is "the noise produced by a sudden discharge of wind from the bowels." Mr. Schneider's *Crepuscul* may be pungent, but it's definitely his, and not a lot of us can make that claim. Available through:

www.angelfire.com/in/itchepackrat/crepuscul.html

-Tom Dragomir



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out effects here to make those Italians look twice. We have people coughing up their innards, intestines slit open, acid baths, all set to the tunes of such class acts as Impaled and Bloodstorm. Oh, there is an explanation given at the end of the film for why this is all happening, but I was still numb from all those onscreen executions to really care at that point. Something about someone wanting to take over the world or something.

Point is, just like Sheets says in his behind-the-scenes commentary, he wasn't trying to make an Academy Award-winning film here, he just wanted to entertain us and take away whatever shit we had in our lives for that hour-and-a-half. And I'll thank him now for doing just that.

Catacomb comes complete with bloopers, behind-the-scenes material, and previews for other sick

films. If you're like me, you'll be off to check out some of Sheets' other films, like *Sorority Babes in the Dance-A-Thon of Death*, *Shivers* and *Violent New Breed*.

-Aaron Lupton

THIS FILM IS DEMENTED

Eat The Rich

Starring Terry King, Garvin Lee and Perry Todd

Written and directed by Ron Atkins
Cut Throat Video

Ron Atkins is a favourite among certain sicko staffers of this publication, and regrettably I haven't taken up their admonitions to give Atkins' previously reviewed efforts, *Necromaniac* and *Silzaphreniac: The Whore Mangler*, a spin yet. When our illustrious editor told me that Atkins had specif-



ically requested that I review his latest effort, *Eat the Rich*, I was touched. After watching the tape, I must say I'm touched all right, right in my special spot! This film is utterly fucking demented, careening from straight borer to lowbrow black humour like a pinball machine hitting a Super Triple Bonus, lurching about the runtime with little semblance of a plot.

Three cannibal killers, copped from *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, terrorize and eat rich folk. They live in an underground complex more than a bit reminiscent of the lair of the Sawyer clan in *Chain Saw 2*. As in said film, a federal agent is obsessed with bringing them to justice, in this case throwing his best agents at the case. Unfortunately, these agents all find themselves on, not at, the dinner table. In the meantime the boys capture, rape and impregnate a well-endowed victim, who proceeds to suffer an accelerated pregnancy, and gives birth to a creature that lives in a backpack and eats men's faces.

The three killers are the raison d'être for this film. The Cook from the *Chain Saw* series is represented by Clint, a cowboy-gearred spot-on impression of the more well known Clint in his *Man With No Name* character. General Seizure, chief cook and bottle washer, stands in for the Hlrich-Hlker, alias ChopTop in the second film, a southern-fried 'Nam throwback who just wants a little respect for the service he gave to his country. The third killer is a gibbering clone of the infamous Leatherface, the sole difference being that this lunatic is in touch with his sexuality.

Offensive, gory, twisted, and eminently watchable, *Eat the Rich* is a boot to the groin of complacent, politically-correct filmmaking everywhere. Not for the weak of stomach, your VCR can be forever stanced by ordering a copy from cutthroatvideo.com.

-The Gore-met

WINNING UGLY

Scrapbook

Starring Emily Haack and Tommy Biondo

Directed by Eric Stanze

Written by Tommy Biondo

Salt City Home Video

At this point, you've all probably seen at least a couple of examples of a growing sub-genre known as the backyard epic - low-fi, shot-on-vid cheapies from horror's burgeoning underground. They seem to arrive at our offices by the dozen every week, and let's not mince words - most of them are shitty. Once in a while I see a pretty good one. Two years ago, I actually saw one that blew me away:

Mark Savage's *Masked Avenger Versus Ultra-Fillain in the Lair of the Naked Bikini*. I've just now seen another - and this is no exaggeration - I'm almost too tongue-tied to adequately describe how good it is.

Scrapbook unflinchingly details the abduction, rape and torture of Clara (Haack) by a sadistic serial killer Leonard (Biondo). After several days of near-unspokeable degradation, Clara hatches a plan: she can't hope to overpower her tormentor physically, but she just might be able to use his own pathology to manipulate him into letting his guard down.

Both Haack and Biondo (who also wrote the script) turn in performances of astounding intensity and authenticity that will leave even the most jaded viewer feeling battered and exhausted. The accompanying short documentary (which regrettably doesn't feature any interviews) asserts that *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* was influential on *Scrapbook*, and that's a bit of an understatement. The grubby primitivism that fuels *Chain Saw* is in ample supply here, although director Eric Stanze occasionally shifts gears into a wild, hallucinatory fugue state that's worlds away from Tobe Hooper but works marvelously nonetheless.

The fact that I find such an excruciatingly ugly and unpleasant film so exhilarating is testimony to the incredible skill with which it was made. If *Scrapbook* achieves the cult classic status it so richly deserves, its impact on micro-budget horror filmmaking could be staggering. Normally, the most anyone can reasonably expect from one of these films is competence, and anything beyond that is gravy. But Stanze, Biondo and Haack have raised the bar significantly with a single film, and I rather doubt that most of their peers could even hope to compete.

(Just prior to press time, we received the sad news that actor/screenwriter Tommy Biondo, who also designed sets for *Scrapbook* and helped finance it, was killed in an accident just as post-production was wrapping up. He never saw the film.)

-John W. Bowen



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REISSUES

Satan Still Rules at Hammer Studios!

The Witches DVD

Starring Joan Fontaine, Alec McCowen and Kay Walsh
Directed by Caryl Frankel
Written by Nigel Kneale

The Devil Rides Out DVD

Starring Christopher Lee, Charles Gray and Leon Greene
Directed by Terence Fisher
Written by Richard Matheson
Anchor Bay Entertainment

If the greatest trick the devil ever played was convincing the world he did not exist, then kudos to Hammer Films for their potent cinematic reminders of His Infernal Majesty's omnipresence. Satan makes a personal appearance only in the later of these two films, 1968's *The Devil Rides Out*. *The Witches*, released two years earlier, was based upon Peter Curtis' novel *The Devil's Own* (the title it was released under in America) – the malevolent forces at work in this thriller are African voodoo and English witchcraft, although Scratch's presence is felt in every sinister frame.

In *The Witches*, Hollywood legend Joan Fontaine (*Rebecca*, *Suspicion*) plays Gwen Mayfield, a school teacher run out of her post in Africa by witch doctors. Back in England and recovered after a breakdown, Gwen takes a job in the quiet village of Heddaby, only to find it to be not so quiet after all. Hints of something amiss come early when it is revealed that Alan Bax (McCowen), the priest who hired Gwen, is not a priest at all. Even stranger is the town's eerie lack of a church, a situation which seems to bother the locals little.

Gwen's misapprehensions are stoked by Alan's sister Stephanie (Walsh), a newspaper writer who seems to share Gwen's suspicions about her neighbours. When the father of a boy falls ill from an apparent cure dies, Gwen is convinced that witchcraft is at work. But another breakdown lands her in a mental asylum with amnesia. When she finally recovers her memory, Gwen returns to Heddaby to confront the evil forces at work, only to discover that the entire town is part of the conspiracy.

Director Caryl Frankel does justice to Nigel Kneale's script, slowly ratcheting up the tension until the final showdown between good and evil. Kneale, the mind



Spooked Joan Fontaine is overwhelmed by the devilry she encounters in *The Witches*

behind Hammer's *Quatermass* films, invokes the claustrophobic qualities of country life with finely drawn characters and dialogue. Especially creepy is actress Gwen Frangcon Davies as Granny Rigg, an adherent of "the old ways" whose best friend is her grey cat (Davies plays a similarly witchy woman in *The Devil Rides Out*.) Double bill *The Witches* with 1973's *The Wicker Man*, another supernatural thriller about pagan life in an insular British community, for a tense evening's entertainment.

Extras on this Anchor Bay disc are adequate, including an expected widescreen presentation, theatrical trailers and a "World of Hammer" episode titled *Wicked Women* narrated by the late Oliver Reed, star of Hammer's *The Curse of the Werewolf* (1961). This ill-conceived featurette strings together clips of Hammer's disaffiliated villains to little purpose.

Altogether more special are the supplemental materials available on *The Devil Rides Out* DVD, specifically the audio commentary featuring co-stars Sarah Lawson and Christopher Lee. The venerable Lee has an obvious affection for the film and proves to be an eloquent narrator. His deep knowledge of the occult gives his performance a special poignancy – Lee truly believes in the power of magic and, like his character, has made an extensive study of the black arts.

Based on Dennis Wheatley's book and brought to life through a magnificent screenplay by veteran novelist Richard Matheson (*A Stir of Echoes*, *I Am Legend*), *The Devil Rides Out* is considered by many to be Hammer's finest film and its potency has not diminished with age. Lee is the Duc de Richleau, an English nobleman who teams up with friend Rex Van Ryn (Leon Greene) to save their young charge Simon Aaron (Patrick Mower) from the clutches of a devil cult (here referred to as an "astrological society") led by the evil Mocata (Charles Gray). De Richleau knows that black magic is real and uses all his power to combat Mocata's terrible influence.

The result is a truly engrossing thriller – Lee is loathe to call it a "horror" film – whose power derives from its unshakeable

belief in the existence of black magic. Lee's performance is full of authority and vigour, and Charles Gray, a few years from his role as the Criminologist in *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, displays an inescapable charisma as Mocata, a character modeled on infamous occultist Aleister "The Great Beast" Crowley. Add to this a sinister score by long-time Hammer composer

James Bernard and the assured direction of Terence Fisher (*Dracula*, *Prince of Darkness*, *The Curse of the Werewolf*) and the result is a classic of devilish proportions.

-Sean Plummer



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DEAD AND LOVING IT

The Dead Next Door DVD

Starring Peter Ferry, Bogdan Petic, Jolie Jackunas, Robert Kokai
Written and directed by J.R. Bookwalter
Splatter Rampage Video

No gorehound worth his collection of Japanese bootleg tapes has got this far without having seen *The Dead Next Door*. J.R. Bookwalter's debut feature is a tongue-in-cheek tribute to both George A. Romero's Living Dead series and Sam Raimi's *Evil Dead* films, replete with characters named Raimi and Savani! A scientist unwittingly unleashes a virus that resurrects the recent dead as flesh-hungry zombies. Five years later, the plague has overwhelmed the US, the government forming *Zombie Squads* to deal with the shambling dead. When a member of *Zombie Squad 209* is infected with the virus, the team attempts to track down the original zombie formula and save his life. While sifting through the remains of the

dead doctor's notes, they draw the attention of a religious cult bent on replacing humanity with a horde of hungry dead! As time runs out for the infected member, the two sides battle for the ultimate fate of humanity.

In the post-Scream world, homages may be déclassé, but in 1989, when this film was released, they were a relatively rare beast. It's all in good fun here, with sly nods to the social commentary in Romero's films appearing here in the form of angry zombie rights protesters. As expected, the requisite gore is copious and satisfying, buckets of blood are literally thrown about the set, aided by some surprisingly effective animatronic work. Fave scene: Scott Spiegel, Sam Raimi co-hort, *Evil Dead 2* star and a director in his own right (*Thou Shalt Not Kill... Except*), comes as a doomed *Zombie Squad* member who gets some fingers bitten off by a paralyzed zombie. The zombie's head is immediately lopped off, and the camera lovingly

documents the fingers working their way out of the neck as the zombie swallows them. *The Evil Dead* association does not end with a mere tribute; Sam Raimi, an uncredited executive producer and Bruce Campbell is credited as Audio Post-Production Supervisor.



This is the first DVD from Splatter Rampage, a Canadian company located in the Yukon! This is as good as the film will ever look – it was shot on Super 8 so the grain evident in the DVD is inherent to the source. The title and end credits were produced on video and a couple of tape garbles are apparent in the end credits. There is only a trailer included as an extra, along with twenty-one chapter stops for the film. While the DVD could have included the extras in the Special Edition VHS released a while back, this is still a worthy addition to any gorehound's DVD shelf.

—Andrew Bailes

PRIME DIRECTIVE: EXTERMINATE!

Astro Zombies DVD

Starring Wendell Corey, John Carradine, and Tom Pace
Directed by Ted V. Mikels
Written by Ted V. Mikels and Wayne Rogers
Image Entertainment

My quest to review every film title that found its way into a Misfits' song continues with Image's surprisingly great transfer of a legendary bad movie. Co-written by Wayne Rogers of *M.A.S.H.* fame, *Astro Zombies* is one of Ted V. Mikels' worst attempts at B-filmmaking, a mere shadow in comparison to *Corpse Grinders* or *Blood Orgy of the She-Devils*. While it does have all the necessary elements, including a high score on the blood-o-meter, a Mexican-spy subplot and the luscious Tura Satana, the sum of *Astro Zombies* is less than its parts.

The story is pretty difficult to follow, its convoluted concoction of mad scientists, Mexican espionage, CIA agents, and zombie gore notwithstanding. Basically, the film revolves around a Dr. DeMarco (400-film veteran John Carradine) and his project to recreate homicidal solar-powered astro zombies after they were discontinued as super-astronauts. Somehow the CIA gets a hold of the news and decides to put a stop to it, while the gang of aforementioned spies lead by the infamous Tura Satana, (who is every bit as dangerous but not nearly as show-stopping as her definitive role in *Faster, Pussycat Kill! Kill!*) wants dibs on the maniacal proceedings as well.

While Mikels' films are known more for their titles than anything else, stylistically *Astro Zombies* is a pretty questionable affair. The fact that everything is shot in real time makes it that much more difficult to sit through. I mean, the shoddy props are bad enough, but do we really need five uninterrupted minutes of Carradine using them in his lab, followed by two minutes of Satana having a cigarette?

In short, *Astro Zombies* sounds a whole lot better than it really is, a detail which seems to have served Mikels well; reportedly, the movie made \$3 million thanks in no small part to its legendary campy trailer. That trailer is the only extra that comes with this DVD release, but is still practically worth the price of admission alone for all its tongue-in-cheek tagline type. Also, the film transfer is superb, even though the source print has seen some wear and tear. Not exactly a monumental note in the history of B-filmmaking, but *Astro Zombies'* brand of drive-in schlock aesthetic has served as inspiration and a template for many artists and musicians, the Misfits, of course, being the prime example

—Aaron Lupton

BIG BANG FOR LITTLE BUCK

Big Trouble in Little China DVD

Starring Kurt Russell, Dennis Dun and Kim Cattrall
Directed by John Carpenter
Written by Gary Goldman and David Z. Weinstein
20th Century Fox Home Entertainment

Attention atheists and agnostics! Those searching for proof of divinity need look no further than the 2-disc Special Edition *Big Trouble in Little China* DVD package. Yes, all those fruitless searches can be scrapped thanks to Twentieth Century Fox. Forgive my blasphemy, but could such a magnificent entertainment product exist in a godless world?

You see, in the summer of 1986, audiences forsook John Carpenter's kung fu/gothic story/romantic/action/drama in favour of *Alien* and *The Fly*. (Me, I was scamming my way into seeing *Alien* – I was two years too young to legally get into the Restricted film – by buying a *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* ticket and sneaking in.) Like a lot of people, I caught up to J.C.'s magnum opus a few years later on video and late-night TV, and was entranced by its humour, confluence of genres, and kick-ass coolness.

Disc one is the main course: an amor-



phic widescreen transfer complete with commentary from Carpenter and star Kurt Russell. Together these two have made three of the best geek-friendly films in existence – *Little China*, *The Thing* and *Escape From New York* – and their banter is that of friends, not co-workers. (In fact they spend a good five minutes talking about the state of their families before realizing that they should probably get back to talking about the movie!)

Disc two is a completist's dream. Besides the usual trailers and TV spots, you get eight deleted scenes (which explain much of the film's mythology), a cheesy video featuring Carpenter singing the title track, magazine articles, a stills gallery, and a multi-angle interview with visual effects designer Richard Edlund which compares effects with storyboards. (Hint: To find the hidden Easter egg, press the "left" button beside the Edlund interview. A pair of glowing eyes will appear. Hit "enter" and you get to see the trailers for not only *Little China* but *Aliens* and *The Fly*, the very films that caused big trouble for *Little China* at the box office.)

-Sean Plummer

GIRLS WHO LIKE GIRLS WITH FANGS

Varnovytis Leshos DVD

Starring Ewa Strömberg, Soledad Miranda and Andrés Morales
Directed by Jess Franco
Written by Jaime Chávam
Synapse Films

Interested in lesbian vampire movies – the most beloved by acne-scarred ironic poseurs alike – has surged in recent years, as evidenced by the flood of shot-on-video erotic-horror flicks advertised and reviewed within these very pages. Give a director a video camera, some naked babes, fangs and stage blood, and voila! you have your very own low-rent *Carmilla* rip-off.

It was Sheridan LeFanu's classic novella that first equated vampirism with female sexuality, an idea Hollywood was quick to exploit. The first Sapphic cinematic bloodsucker of note was Grace Holden's Countess Zaleska in 1936's *Dracula's Daughter*. It wasn't until 1970 that filmmakers, emboldened by the recent sexual revolution and relaxed censorship,



Vampyros Lesbos: The late Soledad Miranda (left) in her most famous role.

could show what had been implied for decades.

Considered a classic by some, *Fuerynne Lesbo* is prolific Spanish director Jesus (or Jess) Franco's best-known film. Late starlet Soledad Miranda stars as Countess Nadine Carody (the name is a tribute to frequent onscreen vamp John Carradine). Dracula's Hungarian widow has invaded the dreams of Linda, a sexually frustrated (and ostensibly heterosexual) real estate agent who finds herself irresistibly drawn to the raven-haired aristocrat.

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Vampyrus Lesbos is a disappointed, sometimes absurd affair with wooden performances and laughable plot twists, but it isn't technical virtuosity that made its reputation. It is instead a kitsch classic made famous for its soundtrack (an insane lounge score punctuated with spooky organ riffs and eruptions of static), gorgeous Mediterranean locales, a pervasive atmosphere of surrealism (heightened by recurring images of scorpions and dripping blood), and, let's face it, the sex. The lovely Miranda and Strömberg spend much of their time naked, either sunbathing au naturel (this Countess has no fear of daylight) or making love violently. (For all you "Scene Selection" enthusiasts, Chapter 7 provides the most thrills). Miranda's Countess even performs a bizarre but erotic striptease to open the film.

Synapse's transfer, an ancient German Language version painstakingly pieced together from decayed and incomplete prints the world over, is far from perfect but it's undoubtedly the best we geeks and posers will ever see.

-Sean Plummer

BLAST TO THE PAST

The Wax Mask DVD

Starring Robert Hossein, Romina Mendel-lo and Riccardo Longhi

Directed by Sergio Stivaletti

Written by Lucio Fulci, Dario Argento and Daniele Stoppa

Image Entertainment

Maskera di cera (The Wax Mask) was to have been the first collaboration between Italy's two most high profile and influential

horror filmmakers, Lucio Fulci and Dario Argento. Fulci was to make his return to the director's chair after a 6-year exile with an interpretation of Gaston Leroux's *Terror of the Wax Museum*, co-written with and produced by Argento. With Fulci's untimely death in 1996,

the job fell to FX maestro and Argento acolyte Sergio Stivaletti. Stivaletti proved up to the task, delivering a confident and competent first film with a wonderful period air and that *je ne sais quoi* that is the charm

of Italian horror films.

As fireworks welcome the year 1900 into Paris, a couple are brutally murdered, their young daughter the sole witness. Twelve years later the girl, Sonia, has grown to vivacious womanhood and secured a job as a costume designer in an Italian wax museum about to open for business. When a wealthy patron of a local brothel dies of fright after breaking into the museum on a bet, the museum, and its lurid displays, attract the attention of both the local police and an intrepid newspaper reporter. Meanwhile, a hulking figure, silent and cloaked in black, stalks children and hookers, injecting them with a strange fluid and making off into the night with their bodies. It is soon apparent that the bodies are destined for the gruesome crime scene tableaux comprising the museum's exhibits, and both the reporter and a French detective, haunted by the unsolved Parisian murder, delve deeper into the mysterious goings-on in the museum. As with most Italian genre films the plot is nonsensical and somewhat secondary; the real attractions are the marvellous atmosphere, cinematography (by long-time Fulci collaborator Sergio Salvan) and Stivaletti's stunning FX work. The *Terminator*-styled conclusion, while goofy, is nonetheless impressive.

The Image Entertainment DVD features a crisp and vivid widescreen presentation, and includes a bonus stills gallery. Overall, *The Wax Mask* is a satisfying revisit to the glory days of Italian horror cinema, bound to please most Eurohorror buffs.

-The Gore-met

RING FOR DOOM SERVICE

Horror Hotel DVD

Starring Christopher Lee, Patricia Jessel and Betta St. John

Directed by John Llewellyn Moxey

Written by George Baxt

The Roan Group

You may experience a sense of déjà vu with this review; after all we covered this film in our July/August 2000 issue. So why fill more space with a repeat customer? Are we at *Rue Morgue* recycling old articles, slapping a new coat of paint on them and



All Witches Should Die! Patricia Jessel meets her end at the Horror Hotel

calling them new? Maybe...

But simply put, The Roan Group has done a masterful job restoring the 1960 classic *Horror Hotel* to DVD. Gone are the murky tape and garbled sound; in its thirty-plus years this film has probably never looked as good as it does here, thanks to a newly discovered 35mm print. As is the case with their recent re-release of *Dementia 13* (RMB21), Roan is once again restoring a little dignity to cult horror that would otherwise be consigned to the dustbin.

Inspired by the teachings of favourite professor Driscoll (Lee), student Nan chooses to spend her vacation tramping around New England in an attempt to unravel a mysterious case of witchcraft. Stopping off at the ironically named Raven Inn, it isn't long before poor Nan learns that staying in a hotel featured in a movie named *Horror Hotel* isn't conducive to good health. That and the presence of Christopher Lee pretty much guarantees a wild ride well worth taking.

Aside from its gorgeous transfer, the DVD includes an interview with Christopher Lee himself, who happily supplies numerous anecdotes about the filming, the cast and crew, and the film's legacy. Lamer notes on the making of *Horror Hotel* are also included, and trailers for cult faves *The Outlaw* and *White Zombie* are provided, yet, oddly enough, no trailer for the feature presentation! *The Horror Hotel* DVD may be a case of old wine in a new bottle, but one cannot dispute the quality of the vintage.

-Brad Abraham

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GHOUL'S NIGHT OUT

Night of the Ghouls 1959

Starring Kenna Duncan, Duke Moore and Valda Hansen
Written and directed by Edward D. Wood Jr.
Englewood Entertainment

Reviewing an Ed Wood film is always a challenge, since quality is not so much the aim as quality of stupidity. Which makes *Night of the Ghouls* sort of a low point in Mr. Wood's repertoire, since it's simply not stupid enough.

Originally titled *Revenge of the Dead*, *Night of the Ghouls* sat on the shelf for twenty-three years before finally being released by Wade Williams. The film is a loose conclusion to Woods' even looser trilogy, which also included the films *Bride of the Monster* and the infamous *Plan 9 From Outer Space*. Retrashing their roles are Paul Marco (president of the Paul Marco Fan Club), Tor Johnson (the 400-pound ex-professional wrestler from Sweden), and Criswell, the real-life psychic who once predicted all the women in St. Louis would go bald in 1983. The film was intended to be a gothic thriller in the vein of *White Zombie*, and it includes both a black and a white ghost, so I suppose the comparison works.

The story concerns a phony spirit medium named Dr. Azula (boy howdy, Wood sure doesn't skip a beat) who swindles old rich folks out of their dough. But after reports come in of some real supernatural activity in the area, Lt. Daniel Bradford and Kelton the cop arrive on the scene to stumble around

and get their asses kicked by Tor Johnson before the truth is revealed.

So what does *Night of the Ghouls* offer that we can laugh at? The obligatory ultra-cheap sets (the film was made for \$12,000 and shot in less than a week), some fairly ridiculous dialogue ("I'm not blind! I can see he's not here!"), and some absurd special effects (musical instruments hanging from strings and people with sheets over their heads trying to pass themselves off as ghosts).

Lacking any real camp value, *Night of the Ghouls* comes across as little more than a bad film. I realize that's the whole point of an Ed Wood movie, but if it's classically bad filmmaking that I'm looking for, I'll stick to the H.G. Lewis blood trilogy. Regardless, *Night of the Ghouls* will no doubt be sought after for featuring all the classic Wood characters and laughable effects that have made the director a legend in his own mind but, unfortunately, not in his own time. I guess you can't keep a bad film down.

-Aaron Lupton

SPELUNKERS BEWARE

Beast From Haunted Cave 1959

Starring Michael Forest and Sheila Carol
Directed by Monte Hellman
Written by Charles B. Griffith
Englewood Entertainment

If one hankers for low-budget '50s drive-in fodder (I'm looking at you, Brad), one can't go wrong with the semi-classic *Beast From Haunted Cave*, the latest in a series of gumball machine gems from Englewood's kempter-than-thou Haunted Hollywood series. A group of criminals holes up in a North Dakota ski resort, unaware that a really cheesy bloodsucking spider-lookin' thing is lurking in a nearby mine shaft, snacking on unwary spelunkers. (Two years at *RM* and I finally get to use the word "spelunkers" in a review - God, how I've waited for this moment!)

And check out the resume of screenwriter Charles Griffith - *It Conquered the World*, *Little Shop of Horrors*, *Attack of the Crab Monsters*, *The Wild Angels*, the freakin' brilliant *Death Race 2000* and, for better or worse, all three versions of *Not of This Earth* - hell, this guy practically invented the B-movie. His *BFHC* characters are a hoot, and the performances are surprisingly solid (especially Sheila Carol's world-weary, alcoholic gun moll). If a schlocky '50s horror film set in North Dakota during the winter and populated with characters straight out of a Mickey Spillane novel strikes you as incongruous, well, you're not alone. It's also a hell of a lot of fun, and thanks to Englewood Entertainment, you won't have to spend hours SPELUNKING through a delete bin to find it. (250 words and I still don't know what the hell a spelunker is. - Confused Ed.)

-John W. Bowen



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THE GORE/MET

Rituals Starring Hal Holbrook, Lawrence Dane and Robin Gammell; directed by Peter Carter; written by Ian Sutherland. Astral Video.

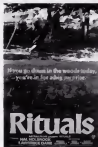
Canada may offer little to the canon of horror films beyond David Cronenberg, but we are responsible for two of the most unsettling modern horror films ever: *Black Christmas* and this overlooked classic. Five doctors take turns arranging a secret annual vacation, this year a fly-in fishing trip into the Cauldron of the Moon, a remote river area in northern Ontario. After a night of carousing, they discover their boots have been stolen. The only doctor with an extra pair of shoes volunteers to hike to a distant hydro dam for help. Left alone, the four remaining men awaken the second night to discover the decapitated head of a deer hanging from a tree. Unnerved, the four physicians decide to leave their campsite and make their own way to the dam. An unseen stalker follows, cutting a beehive from a tree, forcing the men to blindly flee from the angry insects. In the ensuing panic one of them doesn't make it to the safety of the nearby river, his neck snapped.

The three remaining men press on, their internal and outward conflicts exacerbated by their plight. While crossing a section of

river, one of the men steps into a bear trap, his leg broken, their hopes dashed. The two remaining doctors struggle on, dragging their comatose, stretcher-bound companion through an otherworldly, forest fire-navigated landscape. They finally reach the dam, and only then begin their ultimate battle for survival.

Rituals, made in 1976, predates both the camper cut-ups that came in the wake of *Friday the 13th* and the slasher film boom of the early '80s. Instead of casting cheese-cake thirtysons and killing them off after titillating softcore porn scenes, *Rituals* features grown men with individual insecurities and emotional baggage despairing in the face of irrationality and utter madness. The grueling climax puts forth the hypothesis that despite all the education and socialization we as a species aspire to, the deepest depths of a man's soul is rooted in primordial savagery.

The rare Astral Video release is the only version of the uncut theatrical release available; the US Embassy release is the cut TV version.



Ah the sounds of summer... the lone cry of a distant loon across a serene lake, the ever-present buzz of mosquitoes and the dull, wet thwack of a machete slammed into an unfortunate camper's skull. This issue we celebrate the summer season by looking at two terror-ific films lost in the shadow cast by a certain hockey-masked automaton. Backwoods horror did NOT begin and end on Friday the 13th...



Just Before Dawn

Starring George Kennedy, Chris Lemmon, Jamie Rose; Directed by Jeff Lieberman; Written by Mark Arywitz, Gregg Irving and Joseph Middleton. Paragon Video.

Just Before Dawn, made the same year as the first of that infamous franchise of summer

camp nightmares, is a superior film in many ways. The plot is essentially the same as *Rituals*. Five twenty-somethings, led by Jonathan (Lemmon), are venturing into a remote Oregon mountain range to visit the property Jonathan has recently inherited, despite the warnings of Ranger Roy (Kennedy). Stalked by a hulking hillbilly, the campers begin to disappear one by one, dying gruesome deaths.

There are no real surprises here, except for a mid-point plot twist; what makes this film unique is Lieberman's deft touch at generating suspense. Between the sly use of music, some interesting camera techniques, and a gorgeous location, Lieberman manages to generate a level of dread not normally found in what is essentially a slasher film. *Just Before Dawn* incorporates some of the best elements of *The Hills Have Eyes* and *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, even though Lieberman vociferously denies ever having seen these films.

Just Before Dawn has had at least two video releases, one by the now defunct US Paragon label, and a second by the also defunct Canadian Vogue Video label. Like *Rituals*, it remains something of a lost classic, forgotten in the plethora of recent DVD re-releases.

In the case of *Rituals*, however, plans are afoot to release a new DVD hopefully within the foreseeable future. More details when they become available. **A**

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REPAIRMAN JACK IS BACK!

A PRIME TIME GUIDE TO TERROR

THE MASTER'S METHODS



Hosts
F. Paul Wilson
Gauntlet Press

A couple of years ago, I picked up F. Paul Wilson's seminal horror novel *The Town*, a book about a vigilante called Repairman Jack who saves humanity by getting rid of supernatural demons hell-bent on world domination. I had forgotten about it until I found out that Repairman Jack was back in Wilson's latest, the seventh installment of his Adversary Cycle novels.

In *Hosts*, Jack must save mankind yet again, this time from a disease that threatens to turn the world population into organic androids à la *Body Snatchers*. *Hosts* begins with a bang, when a lunatic decides to shoot a wagon of subway commuters full of holes, and Jack happens to be on hand to save the day. Add to this an overzealous reporter determined to get an exclusive from the mysterious hero, a long lost sister whose lover's medical treatments threaten national security, and a couple of pyromaniac brothers who would like to blow Jack up, and you've got the makings of the story.

Genre veteran Wilson has crafted yet another fine action thriller, but this time, he pads his story with philosophical content –



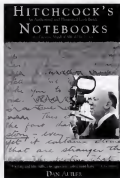
Jack rants about people's right to bear arms, the horrors of conformity, and the spinelessness of most human beings. Solid as a stand-alone novel or as a series installment, *Hosts* may not be as chilling as some of its predecessors, but that may just be because of Repairman Jack's dependability. Suffice it to say that the book is worthy of its hero, and the hero is one helluva guy.

—Nina Mouzitchka

Terror Television
John Kenneth Muir
McFarland & Co. Inc.

Everyone remembers *Night Gallery*, *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* and *Twin Peaks* and everyone today watches *Buffy* and *The X-Files*. But you really have to dig back into the grey matter to recall *Shadows Chasers*, *The Next Step Beyond*, and an obscure 1972 series called *The Sixth Sense*(!). You'll find all of that in John Kenneth Muir's definitive look at the best (and worst) of horror television from the past 30 years.

Terror Television is divided into two main sections: the first deals with horror television series, covering the span from *Night Gallery* (1970) all the way up to *Angel* (1999), while the second deals primarily



with horror hybrids such as *Nowhere Man*, *Amazing Stories* and *Baywatch Nights* (surely the most terrifying hour this reviewer has experienced since the halcyon days of *Cop Rock*). Each show is given a solid critique, discussing its genesis, the behind-the-scenes maneuverings, reviews and generally detailed episode synopses, complete with airdates and guest casts. Some interesting tidbits: both David Cronenberg and Atom Egoyan (*Exotica*) directed episodes of the Toronto-lensed *Friday the 13th: The Series*, and Tim Burton directed an episode of 1985's revival of *Alfred Hitchcock*.

Overall this hefty tome is well compiled and researched (although some errors abound, most notably in the episode synopses), and Muir does provide some good critical analysis, although he has a tendency to trumpet his own personal views a little too much to remain an unbiased commentator. The book has a decidedly American perspective; in spite of chapters devoted to Canadian shows (*The Outer Limits*, *Psi-Factor*), there is no representation from British television. I suppose like many of his countrymen, Muir considers Canada to be part of America.

Still, if you have more than a passing interest in the shows that terrified you when

you were growing up, *Terror Television* will be an informative read, and you'll finally be able to get the title of that *Freddy's Nightmares* episode that made you sleep with the light on.

-Brad Abraham

Hitchcock's Notebooks

Dan Aulier
Harper Collins

There is the infamous story of Peter Bogdanovich being offered the directing chores on the Roger Corman assassination thriller *Targets*. Corman tells Bogdanovich: "On this picture, I want you to be Hitchcock." Notorious for planning every meticulous detail of his films, Hitchcock's methods had convinced Corman that said attention to minutia would keep the future Oscar-winning Bogdanovich on budget (\$125,000 to be exact). Hitchcock's prowess is legendary, and filmmakers and filmgoers have always been left to wonder just how he managed to pull it all off.

Fortunately, Dan Aulier has compiled what is a valuable tome of Hitchcock's sketches, storyboards, memos and more in the aptly-titled *Hitchcock's Notebooks*. Tracing the Master of Suspense's entire extraordinary career, this is a comprehensive analysis of a cinematic legend's creative process, as well as a valuable resource for aspiring filmmakers. No stone is left unturned, making the reader privy to the amount of focus and detail Hitchcock brought to all his films.

Perhaps the greatest director of populist entertainment ever, Alfred Hitchcock was an industry unto himself. Books, movies, games, even his infamous TV show constantly put his face to the work he created. This treasure trove of materials sheds new light on the man's creativity, shrewd business maneuverings and the nuts and bolts aspect of filmmaking that most people aren't even aware exists. From the highly detailed casting notes of *Rebecca* and stills from 1927's *The Mountain Eagle* to storyboards from the most famous sequences in *The Birds* and *North by Northwest*, Aulier has done a magnificent job in compiling sketches, essays and photographs from the Hitchcock family collection, while supplying informative commentary that never overwhelms Hitchcock's work; the master himself might as well have penned *Hitchcock's Notebooks*. Any self-respecting Hitchcock fan shouldn't be caught without it.

-Brad Abraham



Master at Work: Hitchcock creates the template for a scene in *Dial M for Murder*

The Lost Jack Ketchum Leisure Books

Jack Ketchum is a talented writer. *The Girl Next Door*, perhaps his best known work, is among my top ten reads of all time and I ordered *The Lost* from Amazon more than a month before an advance copy was sent into the office. But unfortunately, I have to report that this most recent offering isn't Ketchum's finest hour. No, it's the hour between 7 and 8 a.m. Sure, there's toast and jam and a hot shower, but also stale breath, lingering fatigue, and the anticipation of commuter traffic...

The Lost revolves around the story of Ray Pye, who executed two girls in 1965. Four years later, the murders have gone unsolved, and his two best friends who witnessed the killings aren't saying anything. But according to the back cover blurb, the "worst was yet to come."

I disagree. *The Lost* peaked in the prologue. What followed was a readable but chill-less drama set against a backdrop of often laborious saxes references (Vietnam, John Lennon, America's loss of innocence, etc.). The dialogue is at times forced, and the main characters are underdeveloped. With the exception of the opening scene, even Ketchum's signature violence seemed a touch subdued. The one device that really generated suspense - writing passages from a cat's perspective - wasn't fully exploited.

When Pye finally snaps, it's the culmination of mundane relationship angst, pressure from a worn-out cop we've all seen before, and the influence of the media's coverage of

the Manson murders. We're given very little insight into the killer's mind. Sure, he thinks women who reject him are "lezzie cunts," but he seems like a fairly average asshole. If that's the author's point - that evil is mundane - he captured it far more effectively in *GND*, where the first person narrative structure allowed the evil woman next door to be inexplicable and unreadable (and hence, far more malevolent).

Perhaps Ketchum is a victim of his own talent. *The Lost* is competent, but from the man who has penned some of the finest horror ever written, that's a failure. Ketchum's genius has struck before, and I'm sure it will again. But not this time.

-Eric Sparling

American Gods Neil Gaiman Harper Collins Press

From Mt. Olympus to Asgard, the old gods are nowhere to be found. The cultures and civilizations that worshipped and feared them have become mythic themselves, and the lines between fantasy and reality have blurred as the years go by.

According to Neil Gaiman, the old gods immigrated to America. There, they drive taxis, run funeral parlours and work in slaughterhouses. A scattered few remember and worship them, but the new gods - the gods of computers, television and the internet - have staked their claim and aren't about to relinquish it. A storm is coming.



and that is the setting of Gaiman's latest, *American Gods*, a rousing epic that envelops the reader in a tale of magic, revenge and longing.

It's *On the Road* with a cast of humans, magical beasts and omnipotent beings, and the result is an innovative breath of fresh air, one that the stagnant horror/fantasy genre has been craving for a while. It is also Gaiman's best prose work to date. And that's saying a lot, given his pedigree (*RM#9*).

Gaiman's writing is so fresh and accessible that it feels less like one is reading and more like one is experiencing events as they unfold. Each turn of the page takes you to a new world, and the story's twists and turns and epic cast of characters never lose focus, particularly the plight of an ex-con named Shadow as he comes to grips with the world he thought he knew, and now realizes he knows precious little about. Shadow's journey through an America filled with magic and menace will take you into strange lands that may exist if we only look hard enough. From our perspective, *American Gods* is a masterpiece for the new millennium.

-Brad Abraham

Judas Eyes Barry Hoffman Edge Books

Publisher/author Barry Hoffman is no stranger to controversy, having personally provided the public with the kinds of books that special interest groups warn librarians about. Just last year we gave you the story about how Hoffman ran into trouble at the University of Pennsylvania, after his book *Born Bad* managed to set off some of the campus dignitaries (see *RM#16*).

Not surprisingly, Hoffman's latest and third installment in his Eyes series challenges the reader to look inward and question their beliefs about society.



How To Write Books That Go Bump In The Night...

Writing Horror
Edo Van Belkom
Self-Counsel Press

No one was ever taught how to write by reading a "how to" book, and readers of *Writing Horror* will be no exception. There's only one way to learn how to write: you write (and read, read, read). One of the strengths of this work, however, is that Belkom is the first person to admit that very thing.

I admit, I've never read any of the author's fiction, but I will now. And that's probably the main reason why you should read this non-fiction piece - the writing. Being an aspiring scribe is lonely work. Anything you can find about your favourite hobby (career aspiration?) is welcome. It's even more welcome if it's well written, which this book is. Call it cheap therapy - it comforts and inspires you; it lets you know that you're not the only one who thinks it's a good deal spending \$200 bucks on postage to submit a short story to magazines, for the chance to sell it for a fiver and a contributor's copy.

Belkom also provides a fair amount of insight into the process of trying to get published. He provides information on manuscript formats that I had never heard of. And he provides basic, but important, advice on getting an agent and signing contracts.

Where he fails is in his attempts to live up to the title of the book. Chapters on establishing character point of view, developing plot tension, and effective dialogue are doomed to failure and I think van Belkom knows this. You can't teach writing in a few well-intentioned pages - that's why he consistently encourages his readers to read voraciously and practice their skill every chance they get.

Don't buy this book because you always thought it might be neat to write - the time you spend reading it would be better spent hammering out your first story. Buy *Writing Horror* because you already write and you want to pursue being published.

-Eric Sparling

After reading *Judas Eyes*, it is impossible not to take inventory of your thoughts on crime and punishment, particularly as they relate to the subject of rape. All of Hoffman's main characters have suffered sexual abuse directly or indirectly, each is profoundly affected by their experience, and all cope with their pain in different ways. Experiencing the process of healing is what sets his book above your typical page-turner.

Judas Eyes might be called a feminist revenge story. The two main characters, Shara and Mica, have both suffered the ravages of rape and have sworn off society as a result. Shara deals with her rage by becoming a bounty hunter, while Mica finds a strange solace in baiting and killing rapists, spurred on by the spirit of her grandfather and "the wolf within". The two come together through a psychic link to each other. Shara becomes the hunter and Mica, the hunted,

and throughout the chase each exacts their own sense of justice. In this process, Hoffman presents vigilante justice as a noble pastime, creating sympathetic feminist anti-heroes. What makes this theme palatable is the story's "fundamental decency and compassion", as Jack Ketchum notes in his afterword.

Though Hoffman's style is occasionally awkward and the characters almost superhuman to a fault, *Judas Eyes* holds up, even if it's less as a horror novel and more as a mystery/fantasy with a whiff of the horrific. Hoffman captures his characters' rage perfectly and creates a fantasy scenario that vindicates the feminine plight. Surprisingly - considering it was written by a male - *Judas Eyes* comes highly recommended to our female readers, and our male readers with a sympathetic ear.

-Mary-Beth Hollyer



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TERROR HAS BIG EYES

鬼眼 RECENTLY RECEIVED ANIME

BY DONALD SIMMONS



KITE

Anime Works - 45 minutes/Dual Language DVD

Watching *Kite* is a wonderful and frustrating experience. Wonderful, because it's one of the most stylish, intense, and gorgeous pieces of animation I've seen in a while. Frustrating, because poor editing has left the plot in tatters and the characters little more than coloured ink.

RG VEDA

Central Park Media
90 minutes/English Language

RG Veda was the manga that put CLAMP, the all-woman animation house, on the map. But this video adaptation suffers the same fate of *X - The Movie*: not enough time to cover too much story with too many characters.

Loosely based on a cycle of Indian myths, *RG Veda* begins with the murder of the king of heaven by ambitious general Taishakuten. Prophecy says his reign can only be ended by the union of six warriors, known as the six stars. Unfortunately, only

five of the stars are known, and they quickly move to the top of Taishakuten's hit list, becoming targets for every soldier and demon that comes their way.

The artwork and character designs are beautiful (as you would expect from CLAMP), but right from the beginning the plot is impossible to follow. So many names are thrown at you in the first five minutes that it's impossible to keep track of who's who and which side they're on, especially since some of the names are similar! (A subtitled version might be easier to follow.) When characters aren't fighting each other, they're standing around explaining their motivations.

Besides the drag of having too many characters you can't keep straight (let alone root for), *RG Veda*'s open ending leaves too many questions unanswered. An unsatisfying view, this one's only recommended for the CLAMP fanatic.

Kite opens up promisingly enough, with an obnoxious TV host coolly shot down in an elevator by a young college girl (with a trick gun in a trick purse firing trick bullets). It seems that years ago, young Sawa had survived a brutal attack on her family that left her parents dead. She was subsequently taken in by Akai, the detective in charge of her case, and became his personal assassin for justice, executing criminals beyond the reach of the law.

Soon, Sawa crosses paths with Oburi, a young man who apparently serves the same role for a colleague of Akai. A perfectly matched pair of emotional robots, these two highly damaged kids nevertheless try and form some sort of bond - between murdering criminals and trying to escape their masters. Not surprisingly, the high points here are the assassination sequences - masterful set pieces of choreography and camerawork that would have John Woo applauding. There's a scene where Sawa systematically demolishes her target, three bodyguards, a men's room, a skywalk, half

the street and a subway station with a twenty-story fall worked in for good measure. Oburi gets in his licks too, with subway shootings, escalator shootings, and a basketball that gets in his way. It's an orgy of exploding heads, shattered limbs, and the best looking animated vomiting I've ever seen.

Colourful assassinations aside, almost all the characters' actions are impossible to understand. For the North American release, several scenes (most notably those concerning Akai's forced sexual relationship with Sawa) were cut, undermining the flow of the story and truncating Sawa's motivations. Everything seems to happen too fast to be clear about why it's happening, and the story has an unfinished feel to it.

It's a shame that a potentially standout title can become so ordinary just because someone wanted to market it to a younger audience. The old double standard: brutal violence is perfectly okay for the kiddies, but sex (even in context) isn't. Aren't hack jobs what DVDs were supposed to spare us from?

APOCALYPSE ZERO - BATTLE ONE

Anime Works - 45 minutes/English Language

When a show's very first words are "Radioactive mutant bear" you know you're in trouble. Dialogue that sounds like bad Hong Kong movie subtitles are only the first of this entry's problems.

Apocalypse Zero opens up at the turn of the century. Civilization has crumbled away and demons are on the rise. Kakugo and his sister, Harara, are trained by their father in the family business of fighting evil, and are given supernatural powersuits. Unfortunately, Harara goes bad and sets up her own evil empire. Kakugo escapes her, enrolls in a school in ruined Tokyo and becomes the mysterious fighter "Zero" (although his classmates figure out almost immediately who he is), only to combat every monster that Harara sends after him.

Where to begin? The animation is sloppy and cheap. An early shot of Kakugo fighting the aforementioned bear in his Speedos is particularly awful. The plot is clichéd beyond redemption and stock characters only aggravate the situation. Kakugo's love

interest (the unfortunately named Horia) is especially two-dimensional as the spunky-senior-you'll-want-to-puke girlfriend. She'll hug a dying student who's little more than a skeleton and say "Don't worry, you'll be fine!"

Where *Apocalypse Zero* does work is at the level of low comedy. While there's plenty of gore (faces sucked off, people throwing their guts up), it's so over-the-top that it seems more ludicrous than anything else. The mutant monsters, who look like 1930s cartoon characters dressed in S&M gear, push the bizarre quotient through the roof. Considering the city and the school are all in ruins, why do the students have perfect uniforms and talk like they're in an episode of *90210*? ☹



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BLOOD in FOUR COLOURS

Comics
by Gary Butler

Detective Sara Pezzini has dispensed with the dispenser – for now – and in so doing brought a ballsy (if slightly unsatisfying) conclusion to the best story arc in the *Witchblade* series to date. Launched in issue #42, the Pez Killer saga involved a deathly cat and mouse game between Sara and a shady nemesis capable of impossible murders. Impossible, because they involved the lodging of Pez candy dispensers in unwieldy bodily places (get your mind out of the gutter – the first murder featured a dispenser stuck in the victim's heart, sans surgery). To solve the case, Sara has to make yet another deal with her own personal

devil (a.k.a. the Witchblade), which involves condemning an essentially innocent man in order to stop the greater evil – a deal she accepts.

As gratuitous T&A action comics go, *Witchblade*, like *Tomb Raider*, is actually starting to evolve into something worth reading instead of just gawking at. (And the rabid male fans don't seem to be complaining about the scenery in the latter columns, either.) Moral dilemmas are few and far between in the best of mainstream comic-dom; Pezzini's handling of this situation is an impressive – if irresponsible – breath of fresh air, which sows a scintillating seed for future development.

Death be not proud. Metaphysics has always been a specialty of Jim DeMatteis, particularly metaphysical horror. What a disappointment, then, that his take on Superman confronting Death is by no means super. (We'll skip the unintended irony of the subtitle.)

Besides bringing palpable humanity to just about every supernatural character in the mainstream comics universes, DeMatteis is best known for his dark, epic fantasy *Moonshadow*, one of the few comic sagas deemed worthy of publication by both DC and Marvel. By no means is *Superman: Where Is Thy Sting?* a failure (or, given the context of mortality, a "cheat"), but it should have been a philosophical examination, and it settles for being a soap opera.

As the lone living son of Krypton, Superman has to live with perhaps the ultimate case of survivor's guilt, which is only compounded by the stress and anxiety associated with his self-appointed task of protecting every living creature on Earth. DeMatteis pushes Superman's existential issues to the limit by examining the additional – and arguably selfish – burden of responsibility that is his love for Lois Lane.

Enter sandman (well, not the Vertigo character). *Superman: Where Is Thy Sting?* finds our red cape's world(s) crumbling in his hands, as a Gigeresque incarnation of the reaper tells the god-among-men that his time, too, will come, and decides to prove it by forcing Superman to watch everything and everyone he loves die time and again before his powerless X-ray eyes.

Nifty concept? Sure. And DeMatteis does a great job of blurring the fantasy/reality line, leaving both the read-

er and Superman to wonder if it wasn't all just a dream in the end. But the inadequate justification for Death's barbaric and improvised attack, combined with the facile resolution involving the power of love, is less steel than it is tin foil. And DeMatteis usually delivers the gold.



"Sometimes I wonder why we beasts ever came down from the trees in the first place," ruminates Hank "The Beast" McCoy in this one-shot, which takes full advantage of the Universe X worldwide mutation schtick in order to examine humanity's essential, well, bestiality. The crisis on infinite X this time round? Jamie Madrox, the

multiple man, becomes a Wendigo after being forced to cannibalize one of his own clones in a life-or-death situation. But because he's the Multiple Man, he becomes Multiple Wendigo, and the already apocalyptic Earth becomes a kill-or-be-eaten warzone. Guest-starring Black Panther, Warlock, Cyclops, Storm and Kazar, this is an ugly tale told with compassion, and featuring some truly chilling artistic moments, including a fire-lit Wendigo night attack.

In case you slept through the '90s, Image is not your parents' comic book company, which goes a long way to explaining how a tasteless project like *Obergeist* ever got greenlit. I'm as tired of revisiting WWII as any other child of the Vietnam generation – hell, I'm tired of revisiting Vietnam – but there's a major difference between adventurous speculation and outright exploitation in

IN THIS ISSUE...

WITCHBLADE #46

by Jenkins and Cha
IMAGE/TOR CO.

SUPERMAN: WHERE IS THY STING?

by DeMatteis and McCormack-Sharp
DC

BEASTS (UNIVERSE X SPECIAL)

by Ross, Kraeger and Yates
MARVEL

OBERGEIST: RAGNAROK HIGHWAY #1

by Jolley and Harris
IMAGE/MINOTAU

HALLOWEEN II

by Nutman, Yablans and Beck
CHYND

HOUSE OF SECRETS: FACADE

by Seagle and Kristiansen
DC/VERTIGO



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the historical arena, and this project goes well past the point of defensibility.

Meet Jurgen Steinholz, a Nazi surgeon-cum-researcher on a mission from the Führer to build psychic supersoldiers out of rebel-

lious concentration camp prisoners (think: *The Great Escape* meets *Scanners*). Imagine Jurgen's surprise when one of his guinea pigs turns the experiment back on the doctor himself, resulting in an immediate epiphanic realization that what he and the Nazis have been doing is wrong. Oh, and Jurgen gets psychic superpowers in the process, all the better with which to embark on a quest for justice.

In his afterword to the first issue in this 6-part miniseries, writer Dan Jolley says that he hopes that readers will be able to see aspects of themselves in his characters, maintaining that there is "honesty" in the rendering. The essential flaw in Jolley's sympathy drive for Steinholz is that there's nothing honest about his redemption whatsoever: he's just another coward railing at

the taste of his own medicine. Cry me a river, but don't expect me to join you for the rest of this cruise.

That's Halloween II as in part 2, as in the second part to CHAOS! comics' original sequel to the movie *Halloween VI*.

Tommy Doyle — the boy who saw the bogeyman and lived to tell about it in the first movie — is trying to solve the Myers curse, and believes that the key lies in the diary of Michael's raving psychiatrist, Sam Loomis. Must-reading for anyone who thinks that Carpenter's creation had any legitimate life beyond the first movie, and frankly better reading than any of the sequels' scripts. That said: *Rosemary's Baby* or *The Wicker Man*, this ain't.

Once upon a time, seven children saw Satan in the woods, but he saw them too. *House of Secrets* has been an uneven series from the get-go, but at least it's always intriguing. This two-issue miniseries finds the Spirit Court's human witness, Rain Harper, fleeing her duty the same way she



A charcoal nightmare in *House of Secrets*.

fled her past, and learning the hard way that neither option works. Steven T. Seagle's convoluted story keeps you guessing right up to the end, and artist Teddy Kristiansen renders Rain's world in crude, charcoalish lines, conjuring Lovecraftian dis-ease at every page turn.





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REVIEWS BY GREG CHANT, TONY DRAGAN, ANDREW LEITCH, AND GARY PULLIN



ALIENS

James Horner
Various
VARESE SARABANDE

Back in RM13, our John Bowen referred to the scores for the Alien films as "the most effective film music ever written." Listening to James Horner's inimitable score to the series' second film, it's impossible to disagree. Horner has since become a heavyweight in Hollywood, having penned scores for *The Abyss*, *Terminator 2* and *Titanic*, but his music for Aliens will have you second-guessing the dark as you reach for the popcorn. As a fan of the film (who isn't?), I was amazed to find how well the score does on its own, it starts off with tentative musical signatures sounding eerily across the hum of the Nostromo to delayed echoes – a beautifully rendered and frightening overture. The music dutifully follows the movie with every sharp shock intact, and track 24 on this CD presents an alternate conclusion to the End Titles which anticipated a longer version. Even those of you who don't really like scores will be quickly converted. -GC 4.5/5



FRANK HERBERT'S DUNE

Graeme Revell
GNP Ciescimo

When I first saw this score into the office, I wondered why on earth anyone would want to remake David Lynch's *Dune*, especially since the original four-hour version had yet to see wide

release. Listening to this record, however, it made me realize that Lynch was definitely on his own trip (hardly a surprise) in adapting Frank Herbert's epic fantasy. The Sci-Fi Channel's recent version is on the other end of the spectrum, and the difference is immediately detected from genre: heavyweight Graeme (Pitch Black, The Crow) Revell's score. Revell has tackled the music of *Dune* from the spiritual perspective, avoiding boomy John Williams-styled themes for a more reserved approach. The disc opens up with a big orchestral statement and gets progressively more mystical, though a few lapses into "TV music" detract from the overall effect. Although I really liked Lynch's original vision, it's obvious that most people did not (including Lynch himself, who gave his credit to the abominable Alan Smithies). Ditto for the music, which was done by the soft rock band Toto, Fens on either side of the fence will get something from this disc, though, especially if they're drawn to classical science fiction for adults. -GC 4.5/5



GINGER SNAPS

Various
ROADRUNNER RECORDS

I really liked the creepy cut music for Canada's werewolf film, and was disappointed that none of it found its way onto this CD. Instead, what we have here is a lot of music ("inspired by") from the usual suspects at alternative radio: Godhead, Soufly, fellow Canadians Fear Factory, Machine Head, Halestorm and others. Like everyone else, I really liked *Ginger Snaps*, but heard the music on this CD to be largely misplaced and, ultimately, a misrepresentation of the film. Songs from Professional Murder Music and Credence of Fifth Grade, this one's a headachy hard rock scream fest and has nothing to do with the movie, inspiration or no inspiration. -GC 3.5



TOMB RAIDER

Various
ELEKTRA/WARNER BROS.

Everyone I go I've got Angelina Jolie's lips and tits in my face all summer with a full blown trailer about the summer's hottest blockbuster. And although I'm not of that particular mind (the blockbuster part, that is), I can't deny that *Tomb Raider* is probably going to be the spicier coaster ride of the summer. The music, of course, just adds to the party and party is what we have on this soundtrack, beginning with U2's ballad hit *Elevation* and continuing through with tunes from Chemical Brothers, Moby, Fat Boy Slim, Missy Elliot and lots more. The vibe is sexy and weird, but readers of this magazine will probably skip most of it to go for Niki's Deep, Delerium's *Terra Firma* and Ruess's *Abstrax*. I'll be straight up, the word "Tomb" in the title doesn't mean this is a dark album, but if a deviation into rock, dance and hip hop appeals to you, then this may be worth the bother. It is a good album. -GC 4.5/5



MANIMALS

Horrorcore
BLACK BLOOD MUSIC

The look of this CD alone had us wagging our pointy tails in anticipation. Although *Horrorcore* is the *Manimals*' first full-length CD, the band dates back to the mid-1980s when they released an EP and used to open up for bands like Megadeth. The gig went down founder/singer Larry Wolf, who retired *Manimals* for a good ten years and decided to reform only after having stood in for Glenn Danzig at a Mylla gig in 1996. *Horrorcore* marks their return and, as you may have expected, it's chock full of muscled power anthems done in for All Hallow's Eve. The makeup and costumes suit the band well and there's no doubting the *Manimals*' devotion to all things lurking, but I couldn't shake the thought that Wolf sounds a lot like Paul Stanley from KISS. I'm not entirely sure that's a good thing, but the band's devotion to power chords and growl howl may be enough to endear them to your crypt. Look for the *Mani-*

AN ENNIO MORRICONE/DARIO ARGENTO TRILOGY

THE STENDHAL SYNDROME
PHANTOM OF THE OPERA

DRG RECORDS INC.

Before Goblin, Dario Argento worked with Ennio Morricone, a man who certainly isn't short of credits in this or any genre for his work in horror, check out John Carpenter's *The Thing*. Of course, Morricone also scored Argento's famous animal trilogy: *The Bird With the Crystal Plumage*, *The Cat of Nine Tails* and *Four Flies on Grey Velvet*. The first album from DRG Records brings together the music from the three films, and the results are poignant and eerie. Listening to the music of *Bird* (1969), it's obvious that the movie drew a lot from Morricone's *Crystal Plumage* theme (with its sweet lullaby), not to mention from the theme proper, in which a woman is strangled to the sound of a drum emulating a beating heart. For *Cat of Nine Tails* (1971), Morricone drew on a more rhythmic note and the results are unsettling and weird. *Four Flies* (1971) begins with an upbeat Main Title which anticipates the music of *Goblin* and, though strong, I found it to be the least appealing of the three. The disc also includes a five and a half minute interview with Argento as he discusses Morricone.

For 1995's *The Stendhal Syndrome*, Argento again turned to Ennio Morricone for a harsh score which perfectly punctuates the cruelty of his vision. Morricone wisely gave his music a classical flavour which evoked the high artistry of the paintings that wended how on Asia Argento's Anna Magnani. *The Stendhal Syndrome* is ultimately a minimalist score that burrows into your brain but the evil whispering on tracks like *From Caravaggio To Canaletto* made me want to see the film all over again. Also includes interviews with Argento and Morricone.

I have to admit, I didn't think much of *Phantom of the Opera*, Argento's comic take on a genre classic. Lots of classical music will recognize bits of Carmen, Gounod's *Faust* and *Romeo And Juliet*, all of which serve to evoke the film's operatic setting. Morricone plays with the themes a little and produces a classical album which underscores the romance and tragedy of the story, rather than the hard horror. Still, it's impressive. -GC

An Ennio Morricone/Dario Argento Trilogy 4.5/5

The Stendhal Syndrome 4.5/5

Phantom of the Opera 4.5/5



males at the latest horror conventions across the US, where they continue to tap into the homecore (see www.malemales.com) -GC *****



FUNERAL SONGS Various

CROWD CONTROL/RELAPSE

During the long and lonely nights at Rue Morgue's Audio Drama, I dream of listening to an album like this. I mean, what could be more perfect than a funeral song? In trying to bleed the jugular of all of that rich redness, so many rock bands overlook the obvious, but the keepers over at Crowd Control have not. They have selected a list of artists, many of them unknown to me, but I am now acquainted and I am very interested. What's to say? From Reason D'etre's provocative Procession to the creepy depths of C17H10ND3's Burning and Agnivolok's Penitencia, *Funeral Songs* is everything we expected: mystical, profound, unsettling, sinister. A provocative rumination on the mystery of mysteries -GC *****



CULT OF THE PSYCHIC FETUS She Devil RAVEN MUSIC GROUP

In a bid to make the Audio Drama's all-time Hall of Fame, Dho's Cult of the Psychic Fetus brings just about everything that gets our severed heads a bop-pin! into their second album. From the album's ghoulish black, white and red design, right down to the splatter fonts and hot-rod learse, COTPF prove that they are true defenders of the graverock crown. She Devil opens up with spooky sounds of horror that set the mood until the Psychic coffin explodes into a ghastly ghou-surf assault. What spews forth is a witches brew of reverb guitar, eerie basslines and a dead rning crooner (the right Reverend Doom) who is crossed somewhere this side of Dave Vanian and that side of Lux Interior. The obvious Cramps companion aside, the Cult shows hints of The Krewmen. The Ghastly Ones and the slightest whiff of Manson on a tune called Monster Dig

the serious blues licks on Long Black Hearse, hop to the surf n' swing twang of Carnival Girl and cover beneath the creepy unassuming surf zombie sound of In The Shadows, my personal fave -TD *****



THE SPECTRES Blood Sweet & Nitro CRAZY LUST RECORDS

The Spectres shot us a copy of this album along with a note that read: "In case you're tired of all that damn Goth-Metal!" Since then, Blood Sweet & Nitro hasn't left my CD player, goddamn that damn Goth-Metal! From the chunky big guitar riff of Hell-Bent, this disc blasts out with a psychobilly cyclone of dusty campfire yams about long days at the dragstrip and longer nights at the graveyard. Whiskey raunchy and refined, these ditties are also flavoured by the occasional trumpet and acoustic guitar for a broader taste of the weird west. Maybe that's why Blood Sweet & Nitro stuck on me in a way that Rubber Room Rock didn't, despite the Seattle-

based trio's ongoing devotion to three very good things, namely: hot rods, fire water and funeral parlours. This album is a mortuary of cool hits, but I found cold love on '57 Deathtrap, Voodoo Doll, Neck Romantic, Bloodsucker! Cowboy and a killer closer called Just Enough Rope. Drop in at www.thespectres.com, sign yourself up with the psychobilly ring and do the hongman's swing, baby -GC *****



VOLTAIRE Almost Human PROJECT RECORDS

Voltaire made his Audio Drama debut back in November 1996 with an album called the Devil's Bins. Although we were not entirely impressed by it, we couldn't question the New York-based singer/songwriter's gypsy gothic sensibility, which extends to Tim Burton-like animation (Chi-Chan) and comic books (Dh My Goth). Almost Human is a more polished album and achieves Voltaire's whimsical and dark pop style with

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greater accuracy than *The Devil's Box*. Framed with the concept of Lucifer's fall from Heaven, Voltaire devotes his songs to topics such as dating the deceased (*Dead Girls*) and decapitation (*The Headless Waltz*) employing violins and cellos on contemporary pop song structures. While we loved his headspace, we weren't entirely converted by the music, but certainly Voltaire's onto his own thing and there are parts on *Almost Human* that are almost genius. -GC 3.5/5



INSEMINOID
The Blood Spattered Beats EP
INSEMINATION VENTURES

At the rank scent of independent noise terror Inseminoid is the madcap creation of a couple of beat-crazy Toronto-bians and *The Blood Spattered Beats EP*, as the title indicates, first degree ear violation. Fashioning their weird noises in a mad scientist laboratory of ambient, trance and dance loops punched to life by a pounding Frankenstein-sized beat, Inseminoid "pull poetry out of two-bit Italian splatter films." Their experiment is dressed up in the imagery of the genre, which goes to explaining the motivation behind pieces like *Transporter* and *Hut Of The Zombie*. I would have gone with better cover art but *The Blood Spattered Beats EP* lives up to the band's ultra-cool name. Feed the need at www.mp3.com/inseminoid or shoot these guys an e-mail at godofthunder2001@hotmail.com. -GC 3.5/5



DIE FORM
AKT
METROPOLIS RECORDS

It's no secret that Die Form's notoriety as a band has been consistently overshadowed by dramatic imagery. The signature monochrome look is even more prominent on *Akt*, where the liner notes come across as an afterthought in a stunning pictorial journey through birth, death, decay, human desperation, phobic dismemberment and industrialized torture. This time around, though, this collection of Philipp Ficht's side projects and unpublished early material may actually overshadow what's on the outside. The mainly programmatic first

disc sets the schizophrenic mood with a brilliant blend of circus organ and atmospheric on *La Pierre Sans Telle*. Other highlights include *Residents*-like keyboard work on *X Zone* and straight-out industrial on *Autolyse* 8960. The second disc takes a few colossally annoying turns - Yoko Ono kind of annoying - but generally keeps things rolling through the dark and twisted landscape. Ficht even manages to turn a lot of abrasive high frequency digital feedback into a downright infectious melody. All in all, *Akt* is a dark and satisfying bumper car ride to hell if you're willing to strap yourself in and keep your hands off the wheel. -TD 3.5/5



TOOL
Latentecus
VOLCANO ENT./ZOMBA

It's been five long years since *Aenema*, Tool's apocalyptic underwater nightmare, and a lot still hasn't happened in rock. Just a lot of Limp Bizkit and Papa Roaches (Christ, I can't even begin to keep back). Thankfully, metal fans have something to think about with *Latentecus* Clocking in at over 70 mind-bending minutes, Tool has retained their unmistakable black crunch and rolling thunder riffs and added a sound reminiscent of vintage jams from the 70s. The result is a potpourri of mysterious ingredients Clocking out tracks like *The Patient*, the bloody *Ticks & Leeches* and the evil *Time Parabol/Pentabol*. Praised as an artrock band, thanks to guitarist/SFX artist Adam Jones, Tool's brilliantly morbid imagery has the power to etch itself into every ins that it comes into contact with. *Latentecus* is no exception, this one's a creepster. -GP 3.5/5



REGURGITATE
Carnivorous Erection Records

Regurgitate plays textbook perfect gore-core with the added bonus of a vocalist who really sounds like he's coughing up his innards. That obsession with, uh, regurgitation is traceable to the band's Effluvia *Regurgitation of Bright Red Blood CD*, which featured that famous scene from *Falco's Gators of Hell* where the gator pukes up her guts, as both an

album cover and an audio intro. Wes Benscoter (whose *Dog With Ticks* painting still gives me a severe case of the willies) contributes some very appropriate artwork for *Carnivorous Erection*, summoning up images of splatter gore, sexual depravity and brutal cannibalism, themes which are consistently revisited on tracks like *Ascetic Service Of The Dead*, *Just Another Stillborn* and *Parade Of The Decapitated Megalos*. Think that's funny? How about *Skull Full Of Shit And Sledge*, *Festering Embryonic Vomit* and... most subtle of all - *You're About To Fucker Die*. Regurgitate's total gore concept reaches perfection in this light, superbly produced album which also has the distinction of being one of the most intense and disgusting albums in extreme music - quite an accomplishment considering the current popularity of that questionable niche. With *Carnivorous Erection*, Regurgitate stands as the top bloodhound in gore grind's morgue of fame. -AL 3.5/5



MORTICIAN
Domain of Death Records

Mortician reminds me of that part in *Shewshank Redemption* when Morgan Freeman's character declares that the prison rapist isn't homosexual, since "you have to be human first, and he doesn't quite qualify" (or something like that). Similarly, it's hard to categorize Mortician as death-metal, since you'd have to acknowledge that they actually play music first, and there's a fine line between what this band does and sheer noise. The vocals are little more than faint mumbling, instruments are tuned so low that changes in key are barely detectable, and it's all backed up by a drum machine, so that the speed at which the abuse is delivered is augmented beyond anything remotely discernible. You really have to give it to the guys in Mortician though, lively, someone has come along and taken the idea of brutality to near-parody. The musical extremities to which the band has gone is matched only by their love of horror movies, particularly those from the 70s and 80s. This won't be news to long-time followers, however. Mortician has built their legacy on referencing everything from *Reyes Chensav Massacre* to *Friday the 13th* to *The Fog*. *Domain of Death* fits the horror-death metal mold perfectly, this time featuring *The Hatchet Murders*, *Martin (The Vampire)* and *Telepathic Terror* (based on *Scanners*). Though Mortician's music is pretty close to insublime, the brutally violent *Wes Benscoter* album covers, the horror movie themes, and splatter lyrics (*Brutal*

killer binger death!) *Stabbing, hacking, cutting the flesh!* Methods copied from the book! *Leaving trails of bloody profits* - from *Tenebris*), all make for an experience much like the splatter movies to which Mortician pays tribute: you know what to expect, but you go for it anyway. For a horror buff, that's additive. -AL 3.5/5



SKINLESS
Foreshadowing Our Demise Records

Skinless' blend of brutal death metal punishment is a result of an incredibly nihilistic view on what real man Webster refers to as "the pathetic STD we call humanity." The end product then, offers songs of personal torment, fear and hatred, with the occasional comic relief via songs that were written at an earlier, obviously more frivolous period. Check out the sampling "Kick ball kidneys/leap frog lungs/soccer stomachs/tennis ball tongue-tug of war intestines." That sense of humour has clearly been left behind for a far more grim and cynical outlook, perhaps influenced more by a bad mood than anything really horrific. Musically you can expect a primitive form of Montreal tech-metal, (imagine a slower, more rudimentary Cryptopsy) backed up by an especially nasty agenda. Overall *Skinless* is a good entry to get the bad blood flowing, but the lack of gore or genuine terror is apparent. -AL 3.5/5



WRATH OF KILLENSTEIN
Wrath of Killenstein
INNER SANCTUM RECORDS

Although metal and horror have long gone hand-in-hand, it's rare to find them both coming together just right. Too much either way and you end up with very few scares and too many laughs. The exceptions are hard to come by, but they are out there and for my money, even they could learn a lot from *Wrath of Killenstein*, an independent project out of the bowels of New York. Conceived and largely executed by singer/guitarist Killenstein, *Wrath* is a spookhouse of doctored growls, demonic chants, classical intros, horror metal and even a bit of punk. *Wrath of Killenstein* has yet to see

is darkest hour, but don't overlook this ambitious and impressive debut. -GC 3.5/5



STEEL PROPHET
Book of the Dead
NUCLEAR BLAST

Although I'm willing to concede that Steel Prophet draws a touch of endless inspiration from Iron Maiden's legacy, I think the band has endured enough of a bad rap for expanding on the music of Steve Harris and Co. Steel Prophet's sound may best be described as melodic metal with tinges of dark mysticism, but it's hard to dismiss them as simply another rip-off. These guys are talented and have a great songwriting sense about them, providing of course, you like twin leads, chugging rhythms, falsetto vocals and the occasional edgy ballad. *Book of the Dead* is probably the band's most sophisticated and stylized release, and will go far to inducing them into the metal pantheon if they aren't already there. Like Maiden, the lineup changes are endless and the dark sentiments aren't so dark, but songs like When Six Was Nine and Tragic Flaws made us forgive a lot of sins. -GC 3.5/5



TSOL
Disappear
MYRD RECORDS

Just when you thought it was safe to celebrate July 4th, TSOL, the original American nightmare, returns with lineup intact (minus one dead drummer). The band had its roots as death rock pioneers, although that fact is often undermined by an abundance of political material and a mid-career transformation into a rock rock incarnation that featured no original members. At once political and anti-establishment, TSOL quickly

made the change to gothic/ghoul rock, with lead man Jack Graham taking the stage in white makeup, black lipstick and outfits that suggested a taller Glenn Danzig. For *True Sounds of Liberty* (a name inspired by a religious call-to-shout), horror and politics were one and the same. Their appeal lay in a sick, violent and very pissed-off version of goth punk, even though albums like *Beneath the Shallows* leaned towards synth rock and away from aggression. The band has been known to release widely diverse sounding albums, and *Disappear* remains true to their self-formula. Some genuine aggression is found on Antipoc and Pyro, but then things die down and get a little moodier for Resonance and the title track. It's good to see that TSOL are still drawing from horror imagery, although titles like Sotony and Tarnish People suggest that their heads are elsewhere. Essentially a political album, *Disappear* retains the band's trademark death rock sound, boosted by Graham's gloomy crooning. We won't lie to you, this isn't nearly as dark as Silent Scream or Die for Me, but chalk it up as another divergent stage in a death rock band name, est. 1979. -AL 3.5/5



ANTHEMS OF RUST
AND DECAY
Various
DWELL RECORDS

While I will admit that his occasional into vicious hard rock is much more palatable, the fact that Marilyn Manson's music can now be found on WWF - The Music makes his role as a genuinely frightening personality that much more questionable. Still, this tribute album is probably more appropriate for guys like me, because if you can't even get into underground bands redneck his schtick, you'll probably never get into Marilyn Manson. The bands featured here are very underground and, actually, I was really familiar with one contender. Bile by name. Unfortunately it's all played pretty safe and, with the exception of some vocal variations, these covers don't stray too far from the originals, although a techno version of *The Beautiful People* did prove good for one listen. It's pretty obvious that the intent here was to launch an advertising campaign for less-

er known bands like Breke Klox, Lust, and Shockwaves, and perhaps more importantly to showcase the artistic talents of Chad Michael Ward and his Digital Apocalypse Studios, whose work has been featured on everything from a NIN tribute (also on Dwell) to Solowork. Ward has provided an art piece for every song featured on this compilation, in a style influenced by various dark artists like J.K. Potter and H.R. Okay if there's anything really horrific about *Anthems of Rust and Decay*, it's these pictures, by turns haunting, gory and downright disturbing. Ultimately the compilation doesn't aspire to being anything other than a musical sidenote since we can't expect fans to get excited about rehashes of Manson's music. Available through www.digitalapocalypse.com. -AL 3.5



APHOTIC
Aphotic
(INDEPENDENT)

The dictionary for difficult words defines aphotic as "an absence of light," which is pretty self-explanatory for this doom/death band hailing from Title Town USA. Anyone sick with the tediousness and complacency of the recent evolution of doom music (*Anathema*, *Atrophia*, *Karltonia*) will be more than pleased with the depth of darkness achieved in Aphotic's first demo recording. Easily more interesting and professional sounding than the vast majority of bands in the demo stage, these guys have a sinister way of mixing violent death vocals and guitars with all the murky dreaminess inherent in a typical dark metal proceeding. The added haunting keyboard creates a gothic charm, which has a habit of insinuating something truly nasty and seriously troubled. Uncommon in creating artistic dark metal without coming off as self-indulgent, Aphotic are waiting to be discovered by goth, death and doom metalers alike. One band member is shown wearing a *Night of the Living Dead* shirt, which is enough to get the attention of about 99 percent of the readers of this magazine. Available from P.O. Box 8236, Green Bay, WI 54308-2036 or through kpovens-aphotic@new.m.com. -AL 3.5/5



GARY NUMAN
Dark Light
Big Eye Music

You'd probably be hard pressed to find anyone this side of Europe who even knows this electrosynth pioneer is still kicking around, let alone just released his 34th album since 1978. Somehow, the blue collar Bowie has found a way to soldier on, quietly lurking in and out of the peripheral of mainstream electronic music. But Numan's still post-Beggars Banquet live disc is anything but a highlight package of greatest hits. *Dark Light* is a double live offering of material culled primarily from his early days along with some other obscure tracks you probably haven't heard. Recorded live at London's Hammersmith in late '84, *Dark Light* emphasizes Numan's modest blend of programmed percussion, live guitar and the trademark synthesizer sound the popstar used so many trands ago. The downside is that it suffers at times from flat and listless vocals (even for Numan) as well as minor sporadic technical hiccups. And as with most double live CDs, *Dark Light* is strictly for the fans, that is, anyone out there with at least two of the thirty-four discs in their personal catalogue. -TD 3.5/5



EMPEROR
Empirical Live Ceremony
CANDLELIGHT

If's scary the way we laugh at the overkill darkness of the black metal genre, when we consider the real-life horrors that the subculture has spawned. Universally recognized as the number one extreme act within the scene, Emperor will never shake the criminal legacy which has blackened their troubled history. Followers of the band will remember that before Emperor



HORROR MOVIE
T-SHIRTS FROM LIX
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revitalized black metal with the seminal *Anthem to the Wulfen at Dusk*, their label head was murdered by a rival black metaler. Later, drummer Faust was sentenced to 14 years for the murder of a gay man, and vocalist Samoth was given 16 months in the dock for setting a church on fire. This live album covers material written mostly after these incidents took place (when the band came into their own), but still stands as a good overview of the kind of thinking that fuelled all that criminal behaviour. *Emperial Live Ceremony* boasts some amazing production values and, as such, it delivers on the requisite intensity that is needed to experience these black metal heavyweights. Anyone who is really interested in the darker side of this band, however, is urged to check out *Lords of Chaos* by Michael Moynihan and Didrik Soderfink, published in 1997.

-AL 2.5.5



SKRAPE
New Killer America
RCA/BMG

Check out that album cover... ugh! The back has a nice picture of a gouged eyeball or something and you can find more on the band's freaky/cool Web site at www.skrape.com. Skrape comes out of Orlando Florida and boasts members from Genitarians and Slack Mojo and, as you may have surmised, their sound is as aggressive as their points of departure. Some standout tracks like *Waste* and *Isolated* make up for the lack of grueling lyrics which the artwork seemed to promise. -GC 2.5.5



LACUNA COIL
Unleashed Memories
CENTURY MEDIA

As a goth metal band hailing from Italy, Lacuna Coil is a rarity, although goth metal may be a misnomer since there really isn't much of anything gothic about them, nor are they heavy enough to stand in the confines of metal. The band is all about dark melodies and scorching female vocals, but really Lacuna Coil comes off more ethereal than brooding, not unlike a more structured Gathering. Even though the outfit is relatively young, their sound reminded us of goths

who shed their cobwebs long ago, ready to spend more quality time with their instruments. I can't help thinking this all has to do with their nationality, since Italy isn't exactly known for producing a lot of really horrific bands, even if it is the homeland of many an eye-drooping director. Lacuna Coil's heart may be in the right place, but their heart just isn't black enough. -AL 2.5



ABIGOR
Satanized
MAPALM RECORDS

Jason's going to be launched into space in theatres everywhere, so why not Satan too? This is the concept of the latest album by Abigor, Austria's most infamous - and ambitious - Satan worshippers. No matter how dedicated to black metal you are, you've got to admit there's a lot of gall to putting out an album with songs like *Nocturnal Stardust*, Satan's Galaxy and *Batfist*. Abigor. The band remains a mouthpiece for Peter K's Satan-hailing, Christian-bashing and downright goofy diatribe which now sees him taking his dark gospel to the stars. An obviously skilled and creative musician, K tends to spend as much time discussing the true meaning behind black metal as he does on the music, a refreshing quality for a metal band. In case you're wondering, Abigor is the name of a demon of war and indicates the band's self-professed role as the earthly voice of Lucifer. Pretty heavy stuff for a band who conjures up images of Beezebub in a space helmet, but if you dig the black bible, you can do a whole lot worse than the tenth album by Abigor. -AL 2.5.5



A TRIBUTE TO VENOM
Various
Big Eye Music

Before there were church burnings, before the corpse paint, and before the Mech 3 riffs, black metal meant only one thing: Venom. Hailing from the UK, Venom was the uncivil, degenerate offspring of a metal scene that was taken over by effeminate power rockers like Def Leppard. Just like the punk rock music which inspired Venom's brand of devil noise, the band rebelled against

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the right wing, embracing demonology and the black arts instead of the anti-establishment. Though Venom has very little to do musically with the black metal of today, they gave the genre its name (from the seminal sophomore effort *Black Metal*) not to mention its Satanic imagery (adopted by everyone from Slayer to Mayhem). This tribute re-issue features the major classics covered by bands that Venom would have influenced in the early to mid-80s. Kresner brews up *Wildling Hour*, Vo-Vod sings the praises of In League With Satan and Nuclear Assault handles *Die Hard*. A big warning though, if you already own the *In the Name of Satan* tribute album, don't bother with this one — it features all the same tracks with only one addition (Sacrifice by The Electric Hellfire Club). Venom scholar pays tribute to itself with industrial mixes of *Warhead* and *Holy Mat*, coming off surprisingly modern. Reportedly, original skin-basher Abaddon plays drums on all these tracks, which calls into question just who's playing tribute to who, but there's no question that Venom deserves a well-earned moment in the black spotlight. **-AL 3.5.5.5**



IMPALED Choice Cuts DEATHWOMIT RECORDS

Winner of the "most subtle album cover of the year" award, and currently immersed in a censorship controversy in which the manufacturer is refusing to print an album depicting a baby fresh out of the womb with a hacksaw at its throat, Impaled is doing everything in its power to prove that they are the sickest gore band of them all. Born of the ashes of such gorehounds as Infestation, Infamodex (check that cover art again) and Exhumed, the band is on a quest for one thing: total death. Like their gore-grind contemporaries, not only is Impaled one of the most nauseating bands in existence, it is also one of the funniest. Not everyone can come up with titles like *Brutally Disemboweled Symphonic Gore*, *The Ingestion Of Colonic Funt* or *The Inmaculate Defecation*. Speaking of defecation, the band's fecal fetish is a bit disgusting even for myself, but let's bypass that little detail and skip to the black-soaked gory. While the band has only been in existence for only a short time, Choice Cuts is merely a collection of demos, including the classic *With Shit I Am Adorned*, as well as covers of *Cerebus* and *Impetigo*. As a result, the sound on Choice Cuts is raw and unpolished, unlike genre giant Exhumed. Regardless, Impaled is probably gnarly enough to become a heavy-

weight in the gore division, especially with Ross Sewage on their side, a man who claims as much inspiration from The Misfits, Geronimo Express and EC comics as he does from Bolt Thrower, Autopsy and Mayhem. Besides, none of the material on Choice Cuts has been previously released, so until a new full-length musical abomination is released, this should satisfy the bloodlust for now. **-AL 3.5.5.5**



BELFEGOR The Kingdom of Glacial Palaces WWIII

When it comes to Satanic battle cries in a blizzard of ice and blood, why should the Norwegians have all the fun? Belfegor (not to be confused with the '80s goth band from Germany) hail from Poland with an aesthetic and sound derivative of all the black metal heavyweights. Chilling melodies and bile-soaked lyrics sung through a mouthful of maggots at brutal speeds are done to perfection. Summer may be just around the corner, but *The Kingdom of Glacial Palaces* is a cold chunk of emphysema horror that will keep your soul on ice for a while. **-AL 3.5.5.5**



MURDER SQUAD Unsane, Insane, and Mentally Deranged PAYMENT MUSIC

Murder Squad is a project similar to Bloodbath in that it is a "super-group" of metal heads paying tribute to the old school brutality of death metal. Where Murder Squad differs is that its members are from truly brutal groups (Rickard and Mats from Disembowel, Ufo, Peter and Alex from Entombed, the latter handling the gore graphics and disgusting designs) as opposed to the wanky prog-rock of Katatonia and Opeth. The sound is pure filth — a dirty, grimy noise terror that almost has more in common with sludge than total death. An obsession with serial killers and murder bleeds from tracks like *Twisted Head*, *Bloodthirst* and *Slowly Burnt To Death*. There's something kind of unimpressive about the shoddy production and sloppy playing, almost as if the guys created the musical

equivalent of *Henry Portrait of a Serial Killer*. From the gory lyrics to the blood-soaked design and background effects of a premature autopsy, Murder Squad is raw, crude death metal played for only those with an iron stomach. **-AL 3.5.5.5**



GORGUTS From Wisdom to Hate OLYMPIC

Gorguts is not a gore metal band, even though we're sure that was the idea when they first started out as Canada's contribution to the death metal surge of the early 1990s. Instead, these Mont-treillers are truly one of the most chaotically complex metal bands in existence today, so much so that many people find them unlistenable. Be that as it may, the song weaving on *From Wisdom to Hate* has resulted in a listening experience that is as dark as it is disoriented, delving into philosophy and mysticism and coming out a seething beast of imminent ruin. While their penchant for technicality can become a bit much, Gorguts maintains a sinister sense of melody and haunting atmosphere that is rare in death metal, and the band's ability to collapse songs into total pandemonium makes the effect that much more devastating. Thankfully there isn't a lot of "true" horror going on here, more ancient history and neo-philosophy, but Gorguts remains of interest as an honestly unique item in the scene. **-AL 3.5.5.1/2**



SUSPERIA Predominance NUCLEAR BLAST

Last issue we reviewed an album called Susperia (from the band Darkwell), this issue we put Argento's Susperia on the cover. Now we're reviewing a band called Susperia. Is there any doubt that Argento's oeuvre has become a horror imprint unto itself? Splatter fests will be pleased to know that this band actually did take their name from the film (after they were forced to drop the name Seven Seas — gee, what a loss), unlike the gothic outfit Darkwell. But that's where the inspiration ends because the Norwegian black/thrash group don't really create music in synch with Argento's

creep-fest, even though their music is satisfyingly dark, fast, and violent. Susperia represent the catchier, more melodic side of black metal, slicing and aggressive, but not at all frightening or eerie as the name suggests. Then again, Argento did have a tendency to use metal soundtracks on some of his films, so here's a name that may one day be appropriate. **-AL 3.5.5.5**



MAYHEM US Legions RENEGATE

Even if you don't give black metal much attention, you've still probably heard about Norway's — and perhaps the world's — most infamous musical product, Mayhem. It's one thing for a boss player to die in a bus crash, it's another thing to use a photo of your vocalist's post-self-inflicted gun wound for an album cover. And it's another thing when your guitarist claimed to have consumed part of that vocalist's brain. And then again it's a whole other thing when that guitarist ends up being stabbed to death by a mail musician, leading to one of Norway's most publicized murder trials. Taking all that into account, you'd think the band could make a decent living on notoriety alone. So you sort of have to respect a band like Mayhem, who dwell very little on the past and still manage to create new and imaginative soundtracks dedicated to madness, hate, and terror. US Legions presents half live, half pre-production tunes from their *Grand Decadence of War* album. While the live stuff sounds superb with all that evil intensity coming through like Satan on speed, the real treat is in the raw and eerie sounds that lie in wait on the second half of the album. These tracks reveal a black metal that's on a different level, owing a lot to Marz's vocals which maintain a balance between disorder and precision. Of course, really good black metal will always feature a delicate balance between intensity and atmosphere and such a balance can be found here. Rive Mergue recently had a sit down with the boys in black, and when asked which horror films were most influential, Necrotchatter said he always wished he could've played the crotch filler in *New York Ripper*, while Maniac went with *German Expressionism*. No doubt about it, Mayhem is the renaissance act of black metal. **-AL 3.5.5.1/2**



SUSPERIA



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US Legions

With eight new live tracks, one being from America, Mayhem are the reigning kings of hell. Their live show continues to rock over and over that chart the long history of the most controversial band ever.

Well, there are pre-production versions of songs that appeared on Grand Declaration of War that have the raw edge many missed on the last studio release.



European Legions

The intensity of Mayhem on stage is captured in all its brutal sickness with multiple cameras to keep up with the perversity of their live show warning. This video is not recommended if you have a heart condition, high blood pressure or a love for pigs!

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RULES: Carnivore in Great, Omnivore in Ok, Vegan/Sadist



KISS... MY ASS KISS Pinball

Take2 Interactive/Sony Playstation
PC game

Do you remember when you were young and used to play those great pinball games at the local arcade? Remember how the ball looked so heavy but somehow managed to bounce around like a ping-pong ball? Those suckers must have weighed a pound each; a pound of pure metal scrouched down into the size of a large marble! Remember? Well, it's preferable to swallow a dozen of those balls instead of having to play *KISS Pinball*, easily the worst attempt at computer 'pinball' I've ever played in my life.

For one, I've never had to contend with nerve-wracking visuals that flip the view from the top half to the bottom half of the pinball table depending where the ball is. Aside from piss-poor graphics, absolutely no imagination went into making this game; I was bored stiff after fifteen minutes at the virtual paddles.

Some might say that the days of pinball are over, but a couple of years ago Fox Interactive came out with a PC pinball game that was really fun to play. *KISS Pinball* is the type of game you screw around with a few times and then throw on the shelf. For \$9.99 a copy, it's a bit pricey for a coaster, so unless you really love KISS (cause the game has voice-overs from Gene and Paul as well as a few KISS songs), you can pretty much forget about it.

Playability: Vegan Graphics: Vegan
Shivers: Vegan



D&D GOES PC

Diablo II: To Hell and Back

Wizards of the Coast
Role-playing game

Although digital games turned the gaming industry on its head, there's something to be said for the human touch that only role-playing games can give. Maybe that's the kind of thinking that got Wizards of the Coast to release *Diablo II: To Hell and Back*, a *Dungeons & Dragons* scenario based on the PC game by Blizzard Entertainment (RMM19). The PC game was great and this D&D supplement looks pretty good too, with its gaggle of infernal monsters from the original game, the likes of Undead Horrors, Scarab Demons and Wraiths.

As with all D&D supplements, this one comes with the requisite maps and locations but, unfortunately, I found the scenarios were not really imaginative or interesting. As well, the supplement includes rules which allow the monsters to act and use tactics taken directly from the PC game, but these are awkward and not really that well thought out. Ultimately, *Diablo II: To Hell and Back* does not offer a thought-provoking set of scenarios – more hack and slash. It's fun only if your version of fun is to lay waste to a lot of evil in one sitting.

Playability: Omnivore Graphics: Omnivore Shivers: Omnivore



DIABLO II LIGHT

Gauntlet Dark Legacy

Midway Games Inc.
PlayStation 2

Gauntlet Dark Legacy is a 3D version of the time-honoured *Gauntlet* franchise from the folks at Midway Games Inc. who have perfected the modern arcade game. As with most of their output, GDL is not too gory but it is lots of fun. It's fast-paced, mindless action packed sword 'n' sorcery stuff which takes place in a mystical medieval world, you know the type. Players choose from several characters, including a Jester, Sorceress, Dwarf or Knight and fight their way up levels.

I like to describe this thing as a light version of *Diablo II* – you've got all the killing and slaughter without the spooky soundtrack and atmosphere. The big bonus here is the 3D world which boasts smooth tracking and detailed graphics, certainly as good as the arcade version. I blew a Saturday afternoon and evening playing GDL and didn't feel like I'd wasted my time. Would I buy it? Yup.

Playability: Carnivore Graphics: Omnivore Shivers: Omnivore



WHITE WOLF DOES BUFFY

Hunter The Reckoning - The Players Guide

White Wolf Game Studio
Role-playing game

The slayer phenomenon continues to spread and who else to bring it to role-playing but those fine purveyors of vampire lore at White Wolf? The *Player's Guide for Hunter The Reckoning* will provide you with everything you need to create your character. Players take on any number of human characters with superhuman slaying capabilities, kinda like Buffy, what do you know? Hermet and Wayward creed profiles are covered along with new ways in character creation and new traits. Merits (fast learner, resistant to mind control, sexy) and Flaws (old age, low pain tolerance, drug addiction). As for motivation? Kill monsters or convert them? Right on.

The role-playing experience is for readers and dreamers, and so the book has more than enough to spark the imagination in the right direction – some good short story fiction, the rules and lots of ideas and suggestions for characters. Playing *Hunter The Reckoning* with the right Storyteller can make for a frightening game, especially since characters are vulnerable enough to stand a good chance of getting smoked themselves.

Playability: Carnivore Graphics: Omnivore Shivers: Carnivore



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While I appreciate that every beastie that ever turned up in a horror film is being turned into a toy, you gotta give it to those companies that show a little discernment in making their licensing choices. Take this second installment in the classic *Silent Screamer* line for instance; here at least are figurines of historical import – the double bonus is that they look so hideously cool!

Granted, most of you have never seen (and will probably never see) Edison's *Frankenstein* circa 1910, *The Golem* circa 1915, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* from 1920 or even *Metropolis* from 1926. It doesn't matter, you've heard about all of these

classic films and the impact they've had on filmmaking worldwide. The figurines are perfectly crafted and detailed to resemble 3D models of images that exist only within the grainy shadows of worn down film reels. I couldn't decide which one was my favourite, so I absconded from the office with them all (mush ha ha!).

FYI, *Silent Screamer* Reel Masters are brought to you by Mezco Toys, the same folks who put out those *Living Dead Dolls* you all fell in love with last issue. Here is another reason to put money in their pocket, the new line is ghastly delicious.

Available from www.mezco.net or call 212-736-1656.



THE MUMMY RETURNS Trading Cards US \$1.99 per pack or \$19.99 whole album

Don't tell me that none of you liked the venerable Im-Ho-Tep's return to the box office, how else can you explain the millions it made on the first weekend alone? Me, I don't get out much, but that didn't stop me from finding myself in front of a multiplex screen watching the hordes of undead do battle with Brendan Fraser and his ten-year-old son.

If you liked the movie or if there is a geek lurking within you, these glossy trading cards are where it's at for *Mummy* memorabilia. Each has a scene from the movie or an early sketch of a CGI character like the Scorpion King or those Pygmy Mummies as well as a little information on the depicted scene. Gorgeous girls, goofy guys, digital mummies and floating blimp-sized ships are the order of the day, so check these out. Order directly from www.linkworks.com.



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AMERICAN PSYCHO

USA - 1994

Written by Bret Easton Ellis
Published by Vintage Books

Dine with Evelyn. Dinner with Secretary. Tries to Cook and Eat Girl. Such are the chapter titles in Bret Easton Ellis' *American Psycho*, the first and probably only novel to take splinterpunk into the mainstream. Published in 1991 by Vintage (after Simon & Schuster paid \$300 large for it and then refused to publish it), Ellis' novel was greeted with a rush of scattered praise and bitter distaste. The National Organization for Women tried to have it banned, and retailers faced pressure from women's groups across North America who attacked it on the grounds that it was misogynistic slasherporn. In Canada, *American Psycho* arrived to a media circus of angry civil libertarians and angrier moralists, who tried very hard to have the book pulled from stores.

Censorship, of course, is nothing new to the genre. Directors such as Argento (*Suspense*, 1976), Deodato (*Cannibal Holocaust*, 1979) and Lenzi (*Cannibal Ferox*, 1981), saw their work butchered and banned on foreign shores; at home, *I Spit on Your Grave*, *Monsie, Dawn of the Dead*, and *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* have suffered similar fates. But saddled alongside the genre's most notorious offerings, *American Psycho* holds up as something extra specially unnerving.

In 1994, St. Catharines police found a copy of the book amidst the belongings of Paul Bernardo, a young psychopath who stalked, raped and killed women in Southern Ontario, and whose boyish good looks and affluent status were the perfect model of Ellis' protagonist. Wade Frankum, responsible for seven murders in Sydney, also had a copy of the book. And then there was Behn Reynolds,

who killed a homeless man in Vancouver and claimed the novel as his inspiration. No surprise that *American Psycho* made it to number fifty-three on the American Library Association's list of "Top 100 Challenged Books" (titles that civic and community groups try to have removed from library shelves). Ironically, the normative culture of family values and especially its economic counterpart, corporate culture, were the very targets in Ellis' chilling amorality fable.

American Psycho tells the story of Patrick Bateman, a Wall Street executive circa 1980s, whose love of fine clothes, finer champagne and expensive restaurants is only exceeded by his raging bloodlust. Over the course of 400 pages, Bateman details an endless catalogue of designer labels, haute cuisine, ritzy nightclubs with exclusive guest lists, along with misdeeds of rape, slaughter and cannibalism, usually of female victims. Often, Patrick's obsessions are hideously crossed: "Her head sits on the kitchen table and its blood-soaked face - even with both eyes scooped out and a pair of Alain Mikli sunglasses - looks like it's frowning."

It's a tough book to get through, with graphic passages that would try the gag reflex of the most jaded reader. Not surprisingly, Ellis' critics attacked the novel as the product of a sick and irresponsible mind, even if they're served only to add to the book's growing notoriety and rising sales. But those kinds of criticisms are a disservice to Ellis, who is clearly a talented writer, and to his book, which is deftly composed. Although *American Psycho* presents an extremely sadistic scenario, it's also darkly humorous (Patrick attends a Halloween costume party as a serial killer, complete with real blood-soaked clothes, and his rants about the vagueness of '80s pop music have to be read to be believed).

The irony is that Patrick is the only moral person in the entire story. Surrounded by men who worship the crispness of a business card, and women who spend an Algerian's annual wage on Pottery Barn trinkets, he stands out as a kind of hero simply because he is aware of his own depravity. Real or imagined, his ritualistic killings - like his hygiene routine, scripted conversations, and finicky eating - are attempts to become like his peers by attaching significance to the insignificant. Unfortunately for Patrick, it doesn't work, and the proof is in his fracturing sanity. Unlike his friends, he can't find the predator's empty sense of clarity (a point particularly well-illustrated by Mary Harron's 1999 film adaptation).

Let us all shake our heads and conclude that the 1980s were a bad time, we should keep in mind that Ellis didn't write the book as a retrospective, but rather on the cusp of a new decade. Oh, and by the way, some other names on that list of Top 100 Challenged Books? *Of Mice and Men* and *Catcher in the Rye*. To quote a killer: "These are terrible times." Ellis' message isn't a slap in the face - it's a rut in your entrails and a drill in your eye.

-Eric Sparling



You Can Run.... A soon to be dead woman runs from psycho yuppie Patrick Bateman in Mary Harron's film adaptation of Ellis' novel.

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